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AN APRIL PRINCESS

An April Princess



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AN APRIL PRINCESS.

I.

THE PRINCESS.

DEEP down amid the grasses lay the Princess. Behind her, far as the eye could see, rolled the silent land; hill and valley, wood and field, with the white roads twisting in and out like curl-papers among the green. Before her was the blue sea, a great silent sheet, stretching far, far into hazy, cloudless skies. There were no carts upon the highroad, no people in the fields. The whole world was asleep in the noon-day heat.

The sun beat down on the Princess's head, and the Princess looked up at it and laughed. Its light was so fierce and strong that the Princess soon closed her eyes again, but she laughed still. She was remembering an enjoyable scene. To-day was the Princess's birthday, and the Princess's Aunt, with whom she lived, had seen fit to deliver a few remarks to her niece upon the subject of discretion, in which she considered the Princess was lacking.

"I have been hoping to see your flippancy become chastened as your years advance, but instead of improving, you seem to become more frivolously irresponsible each year," said the Aunt. "When you were sixteen you gave promise of a serious and intellectual bent of mind."

"Of course, I took life seriously when I was sixteen," said the Princess. "I knew nothing about it. But now I am older, I have learnt that nothing in this world is really important except being happy. I find a light and careless view of life is the most helpful to the attainment of that object. Therefore I take that view."

"It is the view a child would take," said the Aunt.

"Oh, well, it's much more sensible to pretend the world is fairy-land than an uninteresting dust-heap," said the Princess in a tired way. "Can I go now?"

The Aunt and the Princess had met in the Aunt's study, whither the Princess had betaken herself in a nefarious quest of stamps, for the Aunt's writing-desk was supplied with every aid to literature and method. Essay paper lay in one pigeon-hole, every kind of note-paper in its especial drawer, while stern black sealing-wax jostled that of fiery red. There was foolscap in one compartment and long envelopes and wrappers in another, for the Aunt in her spare moments wrote pamphlets on serious questions, and had once had an article printed in the *Nineteenth Century*.

All these hoards of stationery presented great temptation to the impecunious and careless-minded, and the Aunt's selfish attitude concerning her well-stocked desk did not deter the Princess from secret raids; but this time the Aunt had captured the unfortunate Princess with her head in a pigeon-hole and a red sixpenny stamp in her very hand, and now the Princess was enduring the just fate of the wicked.

"No, you may not go!" said the Aunt. "I am not sorry that an occasion has arisen to give me a chance of speaking to you seriously. That this occa-

sion comes upon your birthday makes it peculiarly fortuitous. You are now entering upon womanhood. What do you propose to do with your remaining years?"

"Oh, I don't know. Have more fun, I suppose!" said the Princess, still in the light and careless manner. The Princess had all the ambitions and plans and hopes that are common to princesses, but she reserved them strictly for moonlight or firelight confidences; in the unsympathetic noonday glare of a relation's eyes they seemed absurd.

"You have no purpose, then?" said the Aunt.

"None, except to look as pretty as I can for as long as I can," said the Princess, who sternly repressed curiosity as an unwholesome weakness in relations.

"Then the sight of the earnest women I have gathered together to inspire you has had no effect?" said the Aunt, looking bitterly through the window on to the lawn beneath the terrace, where a band of earnest women workers was sitting beneath the trees, in basket chairs and atrocious costumes.

"On the contrary, that is the effect the sight of them has on me. Thank Heaven, I know what colour suits me," said the Princess fervently.

"What a contemptibly feminine remark!" said the Aunt.

"I wouldn't be found dead in a magenta coat and skirt," declared the Princess.

"Mrs. Otholroyd Booth's lofty forehead renders me oblivious of the colour of her garments!" said the Aunt, in a curious shaking voice.

"I do not approve of artificial hair, as you know, Aunt; but if a woman has as much forehead

as that, I think she is justified in wearing a *toupette*," said the Princess temperately.

"Mrs. Otholroyd Booth is a woman of strength and intellect," said the Aunt, with a crimson face. "As you have not been blessed with either, I suppose I must give up the hopes I entertained at one time of being proud of my niece, and must resign myself to marriage as your end."

"Oh, I don't mean to get married for a long time," said the Princess; "not till I've thoroughly exhausted life—and I'm only just starting on it. I have been engaged, you know, and one experience of that kind is as good as a feast."

"Nice-minded girls would not refer to a broken engagement in that manner," said the Aunt. "A little shame would be more appropriate, considering the circumstances."

"My dear Aunt," said the Princess, leaning back in her chair and surveying her aunt in thought, "your conventional mind insisted that I should undergo the penalties and pains of a public engagement, instead of allowing me to pursue my own unconventional way with the Slave. That the whole affair turned out exactly as I foretold does credit to my powers of perception, I think. I do not see why I should feel any shame at being so far-seeing and clever. I told you I should be bored to death, and I was. I am quite aware I gave the Slave a shocking bad time of it. I am quite aware that at the end he was as tired of the whole thing as myself; but if you had not interfered, we should have led a most contented and friendly existence without a break up to the present day. You do not understand my ways with men. They are peculiar to myself. The domesticities of

love do not interest me, but that is no reason why I should be debarred from its romance. I do not pretend to have platonic friendships exactly—'*amities amoureuses*' is a good word. That is French, you know."

"I am perfectly aware of that," said the Aunt, whom the Princess liked to patronise.

"Of course," said the Princess, "now that the Slave and myself are free again, we are on the point of falling in love whenever we meet. That is how I like to be. Nicely balanced on the point. There's some excitement about that state. Once fallen into love, why, there you are! It's all settled, and there's no more interest!"

"I consider it monstrous that the Slave and you meet as you do," said the Aunt, who could not discuss these subtle questions adequately, and so pretended to be shocked and horrified at the mere mention of them.

"Oh, why shouldn't we meet, when we are so fond of each other?" said the Princess, with surprised and innocent eyes. "I am sure I love the Slave almost as well as when I thought I was *in* love with him. However, I remember the family conclaves and the family dinners and the family espionage, and my better judgment comes to my rescue and tells me I am much too enterprising a spirit to be locked up in an engagement ring."

The Princess's eyes grew reflective. Her cousin had just come into sight along the terrace. He was a very handsome cousin, extremely tall, and very straight, and pink, and English. He looked an ideal young country squire, and carried himself with a due appreciation of his importance. Beside him strolled

a quiet man, whose tanned skin and clear, far-seeing eyes suggested the traveller. The cousin had met the Quiet Man at the Sports Club, where he was spending his last few days in England before returning to Uganda. As the cousin was a good-natured person, he had asked the Quiet Man down to his place, and the Quiet Man was glad enough to leave the Sahara of London in July.

The Princess had not taken very much notice of the Quiet Man; he seemed a dry, emphatically "grown-up" person, on a par with the earnest ladies who tried to lure the Princess into instructive chats about the franchise. The Princess had other friends to look after—'varsity boys who played the banjo and flirted with the Princess, and formed a most amusing contrast to the earnest ladies on the lawn. So the Quiet Man was rather out of it.

But as he passed the study windows this afternoon, the Quiet Man had raised his eyes suddenly and looked in at the Princess, and for the first time she was conscious of a slightly interested feeling. It was there and was gone in a flash, but the Princess's eyes followed the retreating figures.

"I suppose there *are* some interesting people in the world," said the Princess, "though the possibilities of the English seem small. English people reek so of domesticity—pink, clean, scented-soapy domesticity! I should like to knock them all down like ninepins!"

The Princess's eyes rested on the tall, straight young figure of the Handsome Cousin with morbid fascination. He and the Quiet Man were standing on the terrace, looking across the stretch of lawn and gardens.

"No Englishman would think of exploring new people! They go off to discover uninteresting vegetation," said the Princess, playing with the blind-cord misanthropically; "then they come back, self-conscious, self-sufficient, platitudinising ninepins, with more superior airs and higher collars, if possible, and even more exclusive clubs. No wildness or savagery about them, oh, dear no! They're quieter, if anything. Upon my soul, it's enough to make one *do* something!" The blind-tassel shot out desperately against the pane.

"You will break the window!" said the Aunt.

"I wish I could," said the Princess; "I should like to break things at this moment. I should like to have a good old rag. I should like to go to the Empire, shout something *fearful*, and be thrown out, calling remarks as I went!"

The Princess cast one defiant glance at the Aunt, and waited. The Aunt spoke at length.

"And a nice girl would suppress such instincts even if she entertained them, which I hope would be impossible," said the Aunt, concluding an involved and wordy peroration five minutes after by the clock.

"I don't see why I'm not a nice girl," said the Princess, very ill-used indeed. "I'm much sweeter-tempered than the girls that you call 'nice.' I am far more tolerant and sympathetic, I am streets ahead in amusingness, I am not much more selfish; and if I do not suggest white linen buttons and a work-basket——"

"An atmosphere of restfulness is woman's greatest attraction, my dear," said the Aunt crushingly.

"You will find that out as you grow older."

"I certainly do not suggest a waste-paper basket,"

muttered the Princess, finishing *her* peroration with a savage glance at the unconscious Aunt.

The Handsome Cousin and the Quiet Man changed position; the Handsome Cousin continued down the terrace steps that led on to the tennis lawn, and the Quiet Man turned in the direction of the library.

"If a man came and carried you off in spite of yourself," said the Princess absently, looking miles and miles away past the trees and stiff beds of calceolarias and geraniums, "I think it would be rather exciting; don't you?"

"You are talking like an aboriginal," gasped the Aunt.

"Though the mere idea of anything so dashing and reckless in an Englishman is quite grimly humorous," said the Princess, who did not always pay the attention to the remarks of her elders that she should. "An Englishman would have to know a girl at least a year before he could decide whether he were in love; and once his mind were made up on that point, he'd be another year deciding if marriage were a prudent step under the circumstances; and if he decided on being so very dashing as to chance his luck, he might have to wait another six months before a suitable occasion occurred for his proposal to be made; and then the girl's people would have *their* look in, and say a year's engagement would be the very shortest they could possibly allow. Oh, if I ever met anyone who'd see things through right away, I'd let him do just what he wanted, just whatever he——"

"We have had quite enough of this most unmaidenly discussion," said the Aunt; "and I shall be

extremely obliged if you will refrain from airing your views to-night, as you did at dinner——”

“Oh, I do hate dinners,” said the Princess desperately, “and rooms and visitors! I am sick to death of the human race. I hate boys, I hate women, I hate everybody and everything! I am sorry if I seem to be bad-tempered, but it would be so much wiser to wait till I were in a suitable frame of mind before you give me advice. I am not in a fit state to derive any good from it now. I am simply getting more and more callous, and if I stand at this window much longer I shall have to throw the blind-tassel at Mrs. Booth’s forehead!”

“When I think you are a grown-up young lady——” said the Aunt. It was at this precise juncture that the Princess had made a dramatic and effective exit by the window.

The sleepy ladies on the lawn were browsing meditatively on newspapers and pamphlets; only the Quiet Man in the library raised his eyes as the Princess disappeared into the shrubbery that gave on the fields of bracken and the cliffs. His eyes looked after her long after she had vanished into the sun-steeped world.

And now the Princess had thrown herself down in her favourite hiding-place amongst the bracken and the long and waving grasses. It was not so very far away from her Aunt’s domain, but well hidden—so well hidden that it baffled all the searching of pursuers. And the Princess looked up at the skies and laughed in the sunshine, and felt happy and free, as she always did when she was alone.

“What do you propose to do with life?” said the Princess, with an absurd rendering of her Aunt’s pom-

pous voice and imposing manner. Then the Princess knitted her brows reflectively and considered the question. Although the Princess would not risk turning the head of her Aunt with too much apparent attention to her words and platitudes, yet she often did her Aunt the honour of seriously thinking over her advice.

"Well, I won't waste my life," said the Princess, curling up luxuriously in the bracken and watching a tiny little ladybird creep softly through the grass. "I promise myself I'll see what's on the other side of every door I come to. If the door's locked, I'll climb over or burst it open, but I'll get through. I won't be a silly-billy coward, like most girls. I'll go right on, and take all blows without a single flinch, as a royal princess should."

The Princess looked at the world in the sunlight protectingly. "You are my kingdom, oh world," said the Princess, and she sat up in the grass and gazed down upon the smooth blue water far down beneath the cliffs. "Everything that is yours you must give me, and everything that is mine I will give to you. There is no one I will not love, except the people who put on airs and think themselves important; and I'm not sure that I won't like them also, for importance must be a fearful nuisance to carry round, poor things; and they are my subjects, if all the world be my kingdom, surprised as they might be to be told of the fact!"

The Princess laughed to herself as she thought of a few important gentlemen she knew, who puffed their chests out and patronised the Princess most unmercifully, if they did not openly seek to check her pride and general foolishness.

"Dear old idiots!" said the Princess protectingly. "They can't help putting on airs any more than I can help being happy. Oh, I hope I will always have happiness—I want it so!" said the Princess, and her voice was almost tearful. She was such a very emotional small princess. "But I'll have it. I'll take it. We've only such a few years to live, I can't waste a minute of any one of them. I'll enjoy every single thing that comes along. If people are horrid to me and humiliate me, I'll remember I'm a princess and they're only the ignorant populace. I should think that would keep me from minding very much. But if they're nice to me, how I'll love them, and how grateful and loyal I'll be! I'll be a pattern princess to my subjects, though I put down rebels with a firm hand!"

The Princess lay still with a satisfied and restful feeling. It was so nice to feel all alone in the whole wide sleeping world. And how serene was the blue of the tender skies.

"I suppose the angels live up there in the day-time," thought the Princess drowsily, "though it's really more necessary for my guardian angel to be close to the earth by day. I believe he's one of the great archangels—St. Michael, perhaps! I like to think of someone very big and strong, standing out there in the sunshine, with his head thrown back, looking up at the sun, and with great outstretched wings shining with millions of broken dazzling colours where the sun catches the points of the feathers; and then when he turns, and the sun shines full on them they are sheets of pure soft white. I wonder if the angels like the night-time or the day-time best! At night we feel them

more than see them. They are as elusive as the scent of lilies—dear little child angels, with faces like white flowers. But I like day angels best. I love St. Michael; he's so strong."

The warm air kissed the Princess's forehead; the cool stalks brushed against it; adventurous sunbeams chased each other, quivering, trembling, through aisles of translucent green. Above her head the blue skies shone dimly through a tracery of grasses.

"Oh, I am so happy!" said the Princess, with a little sigh; and lay there quite still, not quite asleep or quite awake—just happy.

The shadows deepened. Somewhere in the outside world a hot and angry Aunt dispensed tea to hot and hungry Visitors, while distracted Maids ran about the palace, looking for the runaway Princess. Somewhere in the world a hot and angry Aunt grew still more angry as the distracted Maids returned to say there was no sign of her, and hot and angry Visitors feigned a sudden violent interest in their tea.

But the Princess did not move, though the sunlight grew more golden and a little cold breeze sprang up from far away and ruffled the sea into dancing waves. Then the flaming sunset died away, and the skies seemed to fold themselves over the earth like great hushed wings, and the Princess looked up into a vast space of silence—how still! how endless!

"Give me your secrets, skies!" said the Princess: "you who are always watching everyone."

She stopped. The skies did not answer as the sunshine did. The Princess puckered up her forehead, then she shrugged her shoulders and turned

away with a shudder from the grey heights that were so far above her little human self.

"I don't care, you can't frighten me!" said the Princess defiantly. Below her the waves broke upon the sands; a line of white glimmered along the pebbles, where the surf lay wet and shining in the darkness. "You'll be always there," said the Princess, "and I shall be gone some day. Just think. There'll be no me at all; someone else will have my kingdom, and I shan't be able even to fight for it; I shall just have to lie quite still and give in. Well, I dare say I shall be pretty tired by then. Oh, I would like to be the sea. You are the heart of the world, you are its pulse; the very breath of you makes us strong."

The sea smell came sharply to her in the darkness; the green of the meadows had faded into shadow; the waves boomed now with a roll and swish along the sands and the Princess thought and thought.

Far away in the world a passionate Aunt sat in a drawing-room, with miserable Visitors, while an equally passionate Cook sent up frequent messages to say that dinner was spoiling; Gardener's Boys returned from hopeless quests; Housemaids wept in corners, and told each other the Princess was lost and drowned for certain; a Distracted Cousin went down to the stables and ordered the dog-cart at once.

The Princess rose at last, with a sigh. The meadow grass was wet now with the dews and sea mist, and the Princess's muslin skirts trailed around her in a limp fashion; besides which, the Princess suddenly felt most fearfully hungry. So she made

her way through the bracken, and then, without a minute's warning, the moon rose over the hill and the road shone out a white thread in the moonlight, and all the trees made sudden shadows on the hillside, while the sea—ah, the silver silence of it!

The Princess held her breath for sheer happiness. She just stood and looked and looked.

"Oh, I hope that heaven's like this—always silence, gleaming silence." The Princess's voice sank to the hush of a whisper. "*I will be good,*" she said all to herself, and she did not laugh this time. She lifted up her face to the silent skies; somehow, they did not seem so far away now.

"Dear world!" said the Princess, in a voice that was a caress in itself; and she touched the bracken, soft and cool, and felt that wonderful sense of intimate companionship a Princess can only feel when she is all alone at night in her kingdom.

Then came the clatter of distant wheels, and the Princess stopped short where the bracken touched the road and lifted her head with a blaze of royal wrath; for down the road flashed the lights of the dog-cart, and straight and stiff on the box sat the Handsome Cousin. The runaway Princess was found!

Now, when you are feeling every inch a wonderful fairy-tale Princess, it is annoying to be suddenly reminded you are only an ordinary human person with inconvenient relations and humiliating domestic ties; and the Princess's eyes blazed fire as the cart stopped in front of her and one of the men jumped down. It did not improve matters that it was the Quiet Man. The presence of strangers is always annoying at family scenes; their embarrassed pres-

ence alone almost constitutes criticism; besides which it is impossible to speak one's mind as freely before them.

So the Princess held up her chin in the air, and determined to make herself appallingly disagreeable.

The Handsome Cousin held up his chin in the air too, and looked down at the Princess from the box seat in a stiff and judicial fashion.

"Well, you are a beauty!" he said.

Strangely enough, this is the most insulting remark one can possibly make to a tired Princess, and the Princess went quite white with anger.

"I should think I might be allowed one day in the year to myself," said the Princess, speaking in a voice which she imagined was dignified, "if only for a birthday treat!"

"Won't you get up?" said the Quiet Man, who stood in the roadway beside the Princess.

"I suppose I shall have to," said the Princess, and now even the Princess abandoned the delusion that her voice was calm.

"The mater's nearly out of her mind," said the Handsome Cousin, who wanted his dinner, and was scarcely more reasonable than the Princess; "you might have some consideration for her, if not for anyone else."

The Princess climbed into the cart in disdainful silence; for that matter, she had nothing to say. To the Princess's Aunt meal times were as immutable and as much to be respected as family prayers. As for being late for a birthday dinner—why, that was worse than being late for church.

"They're all waiting dinner," said the Handsome

Cousin. "That doesn't seem to have occurred to you."

"I don't know that I should have attached any importance to the thought if it had," said the Princess, "after the excellent lunch I saw you and your visitors make, and the excellent tea I presume you made. Good gracious! what is dinner? Just one meal!"

"Meals are the mile-stones in the journey of the day; one can't escape them," said the Quiet Man, in an impersonal and soothing manner. In another mood the Princess would have thought this rather quaint, but now she only tossed her head impatiently.

"I don't see why they should be made into functions," said the Princess crossly. "Goodness knows, it's nuisance enough to *have* to eat at any time, but when one surrounds the operation with formalities it's disgusting as well as ridiculous. I detest people to whom dinner's important!"

The Quiet Man chuckled all to himself; the Cousin flicked his horse savagely, though in his better moments he was a humane man.

"You cruel wretch!" said the Princess, "venting your temper on poor old Warrior. Hit me, if you must hit something. It's me who's annoyed you. The fiendishness of a person who can delight in torturing a helpless animal because he has been kept waiting a few minutes for his dinner surpasses even my imagination. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Do you hear? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said the Princess, in a voice that would have been more impressive if it had not been so very loud and angry.

The Cousin's straight mouth twitched; he bit his

lips, then he burst out laughing. It was an unwilling laugh, but it cleared the atmosphere. He was exceedingly angry, but he was also exceedingly fond of the trying and unreasonable Princess.

"How dare you laugh?" said the Princess. "How do you know I shall forgive you for being such an unmerciful brute?"

"I like the idea of your forgiving me for going without my dinner and coming to look for you," said the Cousin, no longer very irate. "You are always you, aren't you?"

"You are a dear thing, and I am a selfish little beast," said the Princess, behaving very handsomely now the Cousin had recovered from his crossness. "I must give you a reward of some kind. I think I will knight you. Should you like to be knighted?"

"Whatever you like," said the Cousin, in his sensible voice. "I say, I believe you've got your feet wet. The hem of your skirt looked soaked. Put the rug round." The Cousin tucked up the Princess in a masterful manner, and the Princess laughed and laughed again.

"Oh, my knight," said the Princess, "you are such a solid old sensible thing. Well, I've made you a knight. Are you pleased?"

"To be allowed to serve you?" said the knight, with a quite wonderful appreciation of his new position. "Of course; I always have been, haven't I?"

"And now you are duly honoured," said the Princess importantly. "A knight is a most high position in a kingdom."

"Kingdom!" said the Knight. "What are you talking about?"

The Quiet Man could just see the line of the

Princess's face as she looked up at the bewildered Knight beside her. They had both forgotten the Quiet Man was there—so near, he could hear everything they said; so near, and yet so far away from them. He was not in the Princess's kingdom, you see.

"Oh, I wonder if you could understand?" said the Princess with half a laugh and half a sigh. "There's one faint hope for you. You never think me silly, do you?"

"You know what I think of you," said the Knight, with frowning eyes that looked always straight ahead and never at the Princess.

"Nice things?" said the Princess, who adored flattery.

"You know exactly what I think, and I'm not going to tell you," said the Knight, who knew the Princess too well to be lured into flirting with her or even complimenting her.

"Well, I'm going to tell you what I think of you," said the Princess, slipping her hand into the Knight's arm, and settling herself in a cosy fashion. "I'm most fearfully proud of you. There!"

"Don't be so silly!" said the Knight. "You know I can't amuse you or talk to you. I know what I am."

"Indeed, you don't," said the Princess happily. "You wouldn't be one half so nice if you did. You are a brave, honourable English knight; and it doesn't in the least matter whether you understand me or not, for you like me to talk, and I enjoy talking—simply as an exercise. Can I?"

"Fire away," said the Knight.

"Well," said the Princess, "I think I have at last

finally made up my mind what I am going to be. All the people who are worth anything settle inside their minds the exact niche they are going to fill. Now, you have determined to be a brave, strong, chivalrous knight, a little selfish, but a nice selfish——”

“Oh, rot!” said the Knight. “I haven’t made up my mind to be anything.”

“You mayn’t know it, but you have,” said the Princess. “You mayn’t want to paint pictures or write poetry. You mayn’t want to rule or be anything great. You mayn’t want to sin for the joy of experience——”

“Good lor’!” said an embarrassed Knight. “Whatever are you driving at?”

“I know what you mean exactly,” said the Quiet Man, but the Princess was laughing so at the Knight’s look of horror that she did not even hear him.

“You silly old thing,” said the Princess. “I was only explaining I’ve made up my mind to be a princess and do all the things I want to do—things that other people couldn’t dream of doing.”

“Well, of course, you always do; that’s nothing new,” said the Knight, more and more bewildered.

“I’m afraid I can’t quite make you understand,” said the Princess, feeling a sudden horrible sense of aloofness. It is the strangest thing in the world that words are no use at all to explain one’s thoughts, unless there is sympathy between the speakers of them. Affection is no use, nor relationship, nor even comradeship.

And so, though the Princess loved the Knight with her whole heart, and he had been her greatest friend ever since she was a tiny little girl, and though the Knight was intensely interested in everything the

Princess said or did, the Princess always found herself gazing at a long blank wall whenever she tried to dash through into the land of understanding with him.

The Quiet Man in the shadow understood all that the Princess was thinking; but he was going away in the morning, and so it was no use wishing he had met the Princess when he first returned from Uganda, instead of at this last moment, when he was leaving England again, perhaps for ever.

The Princess stopped talking now, and looked up into the great silent sky, and fell to amusing herself with her own queer little thoughts and fancies. "I wonder if the angels are nearest to the earth on cloudy nights?" thought the absurd Princess, rather sleepily. "Perhaps the clouds are the shadows of their wings!" And the Princess shut her eyes tight, and dreamed she saw great angels high up in the skies. Nearer they came and nearer, till their wings brushed against her cheek, soft yet rough, like the Knight's coat sleeve. Their feathers shone with myriad points of moving light; they shone into her eyes and dazzled them. They were speaking, but their voices were angry; they sounded above the din of the wheels.

"Wake up, dear!"

The Princess opened her eyes with a start. The Knight's hand was on hers. A blaze of light shot out from the front door, and there—oh, horrible reality!—there stood the black satin-robed figure of the Aunt herself.

"Where have you been?" said the Aunt, and all the bugles on her gown were trembling.

"Oh, dear!" said the wretched Princess, hardly

awake even now. "It's just like a sledge-hammer right down on my beautiful kingdom!"

"Let me help you, Princess," said the Quiet Man, in his low voice. He was standing by the side of the dog-cart, and he looked up at the Princess in a curious way. The Princess blinked her eyes. It was such a dreadful change—to be dreaming of angels and wake up to an Aunt—that she hardly understood the Quiet Man was looking at her.

"What have you to say for yourself?" said the inquiring Aunt.

"Poor little Princess!" said the Quiet Man in a whisper, and he lifted the Princess to the ground.

"Dinner's been waiting an hour!" said the panting Aunt.

"Never mind," said the Quiet Man, in a friendly whisper. "You're a princess!"

The Princess looked at him with a start. His eyes were smiling at her. Suddenly she did not feel in the least afraid of anyone.

"Dinner's been waiting an hour, I said," said the Aunt again.

"And I am sure we are all ready to enjoy it," said the Princess, with a delightful air of looking at the bright side always.

"Everything's spoilt!" gasped the Aunt.

"Oh, but that's my fault," said the Princess, with more than royal graciousness. "It's my place to apologise."

To which her Aunt could think of no adequate reply.

II.

THE QUIET MAN.

“**O**H, are you going?” said the Princess. The station cart stood before the door; the men were piling it with luggage, stout cowhide bags that looked as if they were used to travelling. The Quiet Man was standing on the terrace, his pipe in his mouth; he took it out when he saw the Princess, and held it with becoming deference. It was not yet eight o'clock, and the Quiet Man was surprised to see the Princess at such an early hour.

“Yes, I'm going,” said the Quiet Man; “it's disgracefully early, isn't it, but I have to catch the boat train. Your cousin said he'd be down to see me off, but he hasn't turned up yet.”

“Oh, if you're trusting to the Knight,” said the Princess, with a touch of contempt, “he never gets up in time for anything. It's a good thing I happened to be down, or you'd have had no one to say good-bye to, though I think saying good-bye is so stupid,” said the Princess, balancing herself on the edge of the doorstep and looking out over the wide stretch of park and woodland that rolled away right down to the distant line of sea. There was a beautiful pearly haze on the distant trees, and the blue of the sea and the skies was as soft and tender as the touch of a wing of a little hedge bird.

"There's so much fuss made when one leaves a place. One has to look out trains and catch them, and pack up bags, and take leave of people, and thank your hosts, and write *hospitable roofers* afterwards. Oh, there couldn't be more fuss made if we were plants being transplanted. Why can't we open our wings and fly away without thinking?" said the ridiculous Princess.

"I haven't any wings," said the Quiet Man apologetically.

"Oh, you know what I mean," said the Princess, with a delicious smile. "We have volition, haven't we? We don't have to be torn from the soil by somebody else. I once knew a man who was going to Africa for six weeks, and it took him six months to make his adieux."

"To you?" asked the Quiet Man.

The Princess dimpled.

"Do you know, I rather wish I had talked to you before," she said graciously. "Why didn't I? Now I come to look at you, you look quite interesting. I noticed you for the first time when you passed me on the terrace yesterday. Why didn't you attract my attention before?" said the Princess, knitting her brows and surveying the Quiet Man in the most dispassionate manner in the world.

The Quiet Man preserved an embarrassed silence.

"You're an engineer, or explorer, or something, aren't you?" said the Princess vaguely.

"Something of that sort," said the Quiet Man.

"I'm off to Uganda now. I'm on the railway. I suppose I shall shoot a few things and see a bit of the country while I'm there."

"Oh, of course, the Knight met you at the Sports

Club," said the Princess. "You're the man who knows nobody in England."

"I've some cousins, but they're abroad just now," said the Quiet Man.

"You poor lonely thing!" said the Princess compassionately. "*Why* haven't I talked to you before?"

"I've only been here a week," said the Quiet Man meekly.

"And a dull week you've had," said the Princess. "I never saw such a collection of women as my Aunt has got together this time."

"Really, I've been quite entertained," said the Quiet Man. "I've been watching you."

"Me?" said the Princess. "Why, I've never come across you. I've been perfectly selfish. I've been just amusing myself with those ridiculous boys and having fun; I haven't attempted to entertain anyone. My goodness! what a selfish little beast I have been this week." And the Princess paused, quite appalled at the picture that flashed before her suddenly opened eyes.

"I've seen you from afar," said the Quiet Man. "You've amused me as much as you've amused anyone. Really, I've enjoyed this week."

"You'd have enjoyed it more if I'd talked to you, though, shouldn't you?" said the Princess, who meant this quite honestly and penitently.

Nine men out of ten would have regarded it as a crude and obvious attempt at flirtation. The Quiet Man was the tenth man, however, and he did not smile.

"Oh, no one talks to me," said the Quiet Man easily. "I live so much by myself, I don't

expect it. After all, talking's only a habit, isn't it?"

"It's a bad habit in excess," said the Princess, with a sigh.

"Oh, I don't know," said the Quiet Man, laughing now. "I'm thought a bit of a stick!"

"Yes, that's what the Knight said," said the Princess absently. Then she met the amused eyes of the Quiet Man, and blushed a beautiful pink. "Oh, I'm so sorry!" said the Princess.

"Nonsense!" said the Quiet Man, and the Princess laughed.

"I am a little sorry," she owned. "Not very, because you're much too sensible to mind."

"How do you know?" said the Quiet Man.

"You have sensible eyes," said the Princess.

The last of the cases was being put on to the cart. The groom mounted to his place, and it trundled down the drive. The dog-cart came round the corner. The horse stood fidgeting, restless to be off. Its coat glistened in the sunshine, the harness glittered as brightly as the dew upon the flower-beds. There was a freshness in the air which made one's soul as dancing crystal.

"I almost think I will drive you to the station," said the Princess suddenly.

A curious little look came into the Quiet Man's eyes; he had looked like that when he had watched his first big lion prepare to spring, but the Princess did not see the look, for the Quiet Man's eyes were fixed upon the ground, and he tapped his pipe against the wall and pocketed it.

"I shall be delighted," said the Quiet Man.

"I'll just get my hat," said the Princess;

there's one in the hall. You'll excuse gloves, won't you?"

The Princess disappeared into the hall, and pinned on a pale blue muslin hat that she had flung on the table last night. There was no looking-glass, and the hat was put on at a crooked angle, but neither the Quiet Man nor the Princess cared very much about that. It was one of those convenient sun-hats which look pretty if they're put on backwards, or any way.

"Now, are you ready?" said the Princess, with all the freshness of anticipation in her face.

"Quite!" said the Quiet Man, so the Princess mounted the box-seat and took the reins. Of course, the Princess drove.

"I call this just fine," said the Princess happily, as they bowled along over the hard smooth drive. "I love driving first thing in the morning. Everything's so fresh and sweet, isn't it?"

"Everything!" said the Quiet Man, looking at the Princess in a polite and inclusive manner.

"Now we can have a good long talk together," said the Princess. "And as you're going away, I think we'll say anything we like to each other."

"With reservations," said the Quiet Man.

"With no reservations," said the Princess firmly. "I shall never see you again, so I shall say everything that comes into my head, even the silly-billy things like 'What a nice straight nose you have!'"

The Princess glanced at him with shameless ease.

"May I say all the things I want to, too?" said the Quiet Man, looking at the Princess with the queer look in his eyes.

"Not compliments," said the Princess, retir-

ing with a frown. She had seen the look this time.

"Good heavens! we've only an hour!" said the Quiet Man. "Princess, may I be in your kingdom?"

"You're laughing!" said a furious Princess. "Oh!"—she drew in the reins with a jerk which sent the horse on its haunches—"I'm going right back."

"Don't be silly!" said the Quiet Man. He put his hands on the reins, touched the horse with the Princess's whip, and they were flying along just as before, down the hill.

"I'm sorry if I seem rude," he said, "but I must catch my train. Besides, it's your fault. If you hadn't said I had a nice straight nose, I should never have dared to ask to come into your kingdom."

"It was very mean to listen," said the Princess. "I was talking to the Knight, not you!"

"I know you were," said the Quiet Man calmly; "but I couldn't help hearing, and I wanted to hear."

"Private conversations sound so ridiculous to outsiders," said the Princess after a little silence; "and I do hate people to make fun."

The Quiet Man thought she spoke apologetically. He wanted to hear her speak like that again.

"Yes," said he; "but I'm going away for years, and there's not a living soul who cares if I come back. You're quite right to call me an outsider; but it's rather lonely—outside!"

The Quiet Man had never been lonely in his life. He was watching the Princess's face.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" said the Princess, with tears in her eyes and all her heart in her voice.

"So am I," said the Quiet Man, "if I may not be in your kingdom. I shall be in a very far-away corner, after all, and I'm asking very humbly. Is your highness still angry?"

"I will drive," said the Princess. The Quiet Man gave up the reins obediently. The Princess flicked her whip, and drove with dignity.

"How do you mean you will be in my kingdom, if I never see you again?" she said, after a little pause.

"You will be my princess," said the Quiet Man. "In my distant corner I shall think of you with the sunshine on your face, and feel——"

The Princess tried to suppress a dimple.

"Properly patriotic," said the Quiet Man in his matter-of-fact manner. "It's always nice to have cheerful memories of home." The Princess did not look quite so pleased.

"I shall have lots of time to think of you," said the Quiet Man.

"I shall like you to think of me," said the Princess, smiling out into the tender blues of the sea and sky before her.

"Really?" said the Quiet Man. He was about to say something else when the Princess spoke; she spoke only just in time.

"Oh, yes," said the Princess; "the more people there are in my kingdom, the more I am pleased. I should like everyone in the whole world to belong to it."

"Tell me about it," said the Quiet Man.

"Well," said the Princess, "I have usurped or commandeered a kingdom because I am that peculiar sort of person who cannot be bound with ties. Dinner is a tie!" said the Princess, with a little sidelong

smile. The Quiet Man chuckled. The Princess's birthday dinner was a *very* "cheerful memory." The Princess had entertained the company with ingenious and instructive theories as to the origin of meals. As the Princess took care to invest the subject with an air of research and intellectuality, her Aunt could not reasonably send her from the table, and so the Princess had been able to skilfully lead up to the point that the importance of Dinner had reached its culminating point in the times of the ancient Britons, and that even now among the Fiji Islanders Dinner was regarded as a sacred feast. As Mrs. Otholroyd Booth was a strict vegetarian, the Princess had the added pleasure of welcoming her as a warm recruit to her advanced and cultured doctrines.

"People only keep bound by these ties because they have not the courage or sense to snap them," said the Princess, speaking very slowly and impressively. She had not the least idea that the Quiet Man had heard all this before, and there is nothing new under the sun, even the ideas of Princesses.

"In short, people care for the opinions of the people round them more than they care for their opinion of themselves. They are only slaves!" said the Princess, with the air of an empress at least.

"Slaves of convention," murmured the Quiet Man.

"What's that?" said the Princess sharply.

"Nothing," said the Quiet Man.

"It sounded familiar," said the Princess.

"Oh, I hope not," said the Quiet Man.

"You are really rather nice," said the Princess, smiling at him. "Well, I don't care what anyone thinks of me."

"You cared when you thought I was laughing," said the Quiet Man.

"I should have forgotten all about it before we reached the station," said the Princess serenely. "People never make me angry for more than a second. I am very fierce, like a sheet of lightning, then it is all over. Sometimes I wither people with my wrath, sometimes it passes off harmlessly; but you cannot put out lightning." The Princess paused, rather surprised at her *bon mot*. "That's very good indeed," said the Princess, with engaging astonishment. "You cannot put me out, see? Now, other women are mere candles!"

"All shining for someone else," said the Quiet Man, with a smile in his grey eyes which the Princess accepted graciously as a tribute to her wit; "all dependent on somebody—children, or a husband, or lovers, or friends; but you shine all by yourself."

"Quite independent," said the Princess complacently. "Fancy being miserable because one silly little man did not like you! Fancy sacrificing yourself for him or anyone! I would give things to people I liked, but the people would have to thank me on their knees; and if people stood up they would just have to go. What if they did? There are millions of slaves in the world!" said the Princess, with a royal shrug.

"I'm not a slave," said the Quiet Man.

"I know," said the Princess. "You needn't remind me, because there's no need. I don't count you even a subject."

"Oh, a colonial subject?" said the Quiet Man persuadingly.

"Perhaps," said the Princess. "You're too independent to live too near to royalty."

The Quiet Man was silent. The Princess stole a little glance at him.

"I'm glad you're going away," said the Princess.

"Why?" said the Quiet Man. "Because you're afraid?"

"Of what?" said the Princess, with truly royal scorn, but her eyes faltered.

"Princesses have been forced to abdicate," said the Quiet Man. "Subjects have usurped thrones!"

"You mean when you took the reins?" said the Princess frankly.

"Something of that sort," said the Quiet Man.

"It was great insolence on your part," said the Princess; "but you weren't a subject then, and you *asked* to be one, please remember. It would be fearfully mean to turn me off my throne now I've so very kindly let you come into my kingdom."

"Thrones are dangerous places to live on," said the Quiet Man. "When you set yourself above the populace, some people envy, some throw stones."

"I'm not afraid of the populace," said the Princess, with a happy laugh. "I love the populace. I'm friends with it."

"It's a dangerous friend," said the Quiet Man. "It has a knack of turning round on you in an unpleasantly unexpected fashion."

"For goodness sake, don't you begin to lecture me and warn me!" said the Princess. "I only stand that sort of thing from one person in the world, and that's the Queen. I don't even let the Jester lecture me."

"Do I know them?" said the Quiet Man.

"If you know the most beautiful, charming, and fascinating woman in the world, you know the Queen," said the Princess. "If you know the wittiest, sweetest, kindest, dearest, and cleverest jester in the world, you know the Jester. He is allowed to sit on the steps of the throne of the Queen, because in a fit of graciousness she bestowed her hand upon him."

"They seem to be friends of yours," said the Quiet Man.

"They're not in my kingdom, you know," said the Princess. "They occupy an adjoining state, which is filled with delightful people and the most appreciative populace you ever saw. However, the Queen and I have sworn an alliance, and we exchange state visits very often; and as the Queen's is a superior state, she gives me advice on how to manage my kingdom. Submission to my aunt is one of the bits of advice; not to rush into friendships with strange gentlemen so very quickly and so very often, is another," said the Princess, trying to look unconscious.

"She's a wise queen," said the Quiet Man. "I'm glad there is someone to whose opinion you attach importance. I only wish you took more notice of it."

"It's none of your business," said the Princess, so very mortified that she was almost rude.

"Yes, it is," said the Quiet Man; "as a loyal subject."

"I am very glad you are going," said the Princess. They are in sight of the last hill before the station. The Princess was suddenly amazingly considerate of her horse.

"I am afraid I must catch that train," said the Quiet Man regretfully.

"There's heaps of time," said the Princess.

"Only ten minutes," said the Quiet Man, watch in hand. The Princess flushed, and drew the whip out of the socket.

"You have no mercy for the poor beast," said the Princess.

"You have none for the man," said the Quiet Man, and looked the Princess straight in her eyes.

"I don't know what you mean," said the Princess, suddenly absorbed in the intricacies of her whip-lash.

"You say you are glad I am going," said the Quiet Man steadily.

"I'm not very glad," said the Princess weakly.

"Oh, yes, I am. Oh, I don't know." She flicked the whip in the air, and the horse sprang forward. "I *am* glad," she said. "You'd hinder my quest if you stayed."

"What is the quest?" said the Quiet Man.

"Well, I don't know exactly," said the Princess. "It's a quest of experience, I think—experience of every kind."

"When a Prince goes on a quest, there's always a Princess somewhere in it," said the Quiet Man. They were so near to the station now. "Surely the Princess should seek a Prince!"

"I should require a King," said the Princess, and raised her head as if it wore a crown already.

"And you're going to look for him," said the Quiet Man, with his eyes fixed always on the Princess.

"Why will you keep talking as if there were nothing to live for but being in love?" said the Princess,

now extremely interested in her fidgety horse. "I wish you would understand that love is of no more importance to me than it is to a man, and I hope I will be in love just as many times and in as different ways," she added, with a side glance to see the effect of this bold and startling statement on the Quiet Man.

"Oh, you want adventures?" said the Quiet Man.

The Princess looked rather disappointed at such a matter-of-fact acceptance of the thunderbolt.

"Like the knights of old," said the Princess, in a stately way.

"They met false Ladyes sometimes, and of them had great dolour," said the Quiet Man. "There are False Princes in the world, Princess."

"Who cares?" said the Princess, with a laugh as fearless as the sunshine.

"I do," said the Quiet Man, who really took rather a great deal on himself for a humble subject. "Listen, Princess. I'm afraid for you. You've only happened to meet Kings and Knights and Slaves as yet——"

"Kings?" said the Princess.

"A slip of the tongue," said the Quiet Man. "Faithful subjects, who honour you and understand you; but what if you meet a False Prince? You think because you're a Princess, you may do as you like."

"I shall, thank you," said the Princess.

"I know you will," said the Quiet Man. "That's the worst of it. You want so much from every moment, you snatch at everything you think will interest. Think of the way in which you've talked to me. You aren't prudent, little Princess."

"You're horrid!" said the Princess. "I thought you were a decent sort, and I trusted you. Is it wrong to trust people?"

"It's very foolish," said the Quiet Man. He wanted to say something quite different, but he had only five minutes before the train would take him away from the Princess. "Oh, don't you understand? You make it so easy to make love to you."

"Oh!" said the Princess, with a gasp.

"There's no hedge round you to break through, there's no wall to guard you," said the Quiet Man. "You stretch out your hands to the world."

"Because I love it so," said the dreadfully hurt and indignant Princess.

"The False Prince won't understand he should respect you all the more because you trust him," said the Quiet Man; "he'll only see how easy it is to work on your pity. You're longing for any emotion. You'll rush into any adventure to show that you are not afraid. Oh, Princess, some men think so lightly of that which has no barrier round."

"I can take care of myself," said the Princess, with tears that were only partly tears of anger in her eyes. "If you think it is such an easy matter to win me, you are mistaken."

"I think it will be the hardest thing in the world to win you and keep you," said the Quiet Man, who was sorry that he had spoken so frankly and wounded the Princess's pride so very much; "but I don't want you to be hurt, and you will be, if you won't wear woman's armour."

"Thanks so much," said the polite Princess; "but if I am mistaken in people, as I admit I sometimes am, it does not hurt me in the least, for the simple rea-

son that their opinion of me does not trouble me at all. That is my royal armour. I was mistaken in you, but I shall forget about you before your train has gone out of the station."

"Mistakes are sometimes made that can't be altered," said the Quiet Man aloud. "And I'm going away for years," he said to himself. "Yes, you'll forget about me right enough."

"I shall not make that sort of mistake," said the Princess. "I shall never give myself to anyone who isn't stronger and braver and wiser than I am; and there is no such person in the world," she added modestly.

"Don't be too sure," said the Quiet Man, and the Princess's eyes met his.

"Oh, I am glad that you're going," said the Princess.

"No, you're not!" said the Quiet Man.

"I think you are the rudest person I ever met," said a marvellously pink, confused Princess.

"My train's signalled," said the Quiet Man. "There's no time for truth to put on her petticoat."

They had come to the station. All the cases lay piled on the road platform. The Quiet Man sprang down and came round to the Princess's side of the cart.

"If you weren't so tender-hearted, I should ask you all sorts of things even now, in this one minute," said the Quiet Man; "but it isn't fair. I shall see you again, though; I don't know when, but I shall see you. Good-bye, Princess! Think of me sometimes in my distant corner. I believe you have almost taught me to be lonely."

"Oh, dear!" said the pitiful Princess.

The Quiet Man put his hand on hers. "The train's here," said he.

"Oh, why didn't I know you before?" said the Princess. "You are the only person in the world I want to talk to. It's as good as talking to myself, only better."

"Good-bye!" said the Quiet Man. He held the Princess's hand all the time.

"Train's in, sir," said a disgusting and officious Porter.

"I must go," said the Quiet Man, and he took his hand away.

"Oh, may I write to you?" said the foolish and imprudent Princess.

"Will you?" said the Quiet Man.

"Train's in, sir," said the Porter.

"Now you think me cheap," said the Princess.

"I think you're just sweet!" said the Quiet Man.

"You're not to write," said the Princess, gathering up the reins in a tremendous hurry.

"I'll send you my address," said the Quiet Man.

"Are we to keep the train, sir?" said the Disgusting Porter.

"No, confound you! I mean, yes!" said the Quiet Man. "Good-bye! Remember, you've promised!"

"I haven't! I shan't!" said the Princess; but the Quiet Man was tearing down the platform after a retreating train.

"Oh, he'll miss it! he'll miss it!" said the Princess, with her heart full of little hopes singing loud as a cage of canaries. The Quiet Man had jumped on to the footboard. The Disgusting and Officious Porter

pushed him into a gaping door. The train and the Quiet Man disappeared together. All the little hopes were as suddenly silent as if a pall had been thrown on the cage.

"Nearly missed the train, miss," said the Disgusting Porter, returning panting.

"That *would* have been a pity, wouldn't it?" said the Princess, with the sweetness of June roses in her eyes.

"He'd never have caught it if I hadn't pushed him in," said the Porter, lingering.

"It was so kind of you," said the grateful Princess.

A shining coin glittered in the sunlight; the groom jumped up behind; and they turned and bowled away.

"Oh, dear, what a long drive home it is," thought the Princess, "and how dusty the hedges are! How soon the freshness of the morning goes." The Princess drove up to the front of the house without a smile on her face; then she threw down the reins and gloomily descended.

"You've missed prayers, and breakfast is over," said the ever-present Aunt, popping out of the morning-room window.

"Oh, really?" said a muchly-tried Princess. "Perhaps another time your son will kindly rise in time to see his visitors off himself."

"There was no need to go down to the station," said the in-no-way mollified Aunt.

"Politeness is always optional," said the Princess loftily, "as you should very well know," said the Princess darkly, as the Aunt slammed the morning-room window.

But even a Princess dare not say this aloud!

III.

THE QUEEN.

"HULLO!" said the Princess.

"Oh, there you are!" said the Queen.

"Of all disgusting wet and slimy places," said the Princess, as she picked her way along the edge of the swimming bath and tried to hold her frock high enough to keep out of the pools on the tiles, and yet maintain the interests of propriety.

"I should feel like a fish out of water," said the Princess, edging round the side of the chute and abandoning the interests of propriety, "only quite half the water in the tank is on the landing-stage"; and here a portly lady dived off the chute, and the Princess dropped her skirts and propriety together, and said a truly wicked word as she shook a cascade of water from her newest French hat.

"It is rather wet," said the Queen, irritatingly serene and happy in her neat blue swimming dress, as she bestowed an affectionate, if damping, embrace upon the Princess.

"Oh, I'll just let my frock slide," said the Princess desperately, and threw out a hundred or so of soaked frills behind her. "After all, it's rather pleasant to have so much cool squishiness flapping round you on as hot a day as this, and not particularly uncomfortable if you pretend you're a seal," concluded the

Princess, who was nothing if not philosophical. Then the Princess gazed round with interest on the many ladies who were diving and swimming and splashing about. The swimming-bath was very long, and baskets of ferns swung from the galleries, and the water was green and invitingly clear and cold. There was a row of cubicles around the tank on each side, and the Princess craned her neck and peeped inside each one with curiosity, and espied all the different hats and frocks that were sitting so patiently inside, waiting for their owners.

"There's no mistake about one thing. This is the place to study womanhood," said the Princess, and smiled wickedly as she looked at the cubicle with a dainty handkerchief tied on the door. It was filled with a foamy pile of ruffling silk and lace and pale blue ribbons, and an elegant confection of grey chiffon and more creamy lace hung from a peg, surmounted by a magnificent Rembrandt hat with a sweeping feather. It did not need the warm faint scent of violets that drifted out upon the tank-like atmosphere to tell the clever Princess who was the owner of this dainty province.

"Well, what do you think of us?" said the Queen, balancing herself upon the diving board, and looking down upon the Princess with the happy smile of a woman who knows she looks her best.

"Honestly?" said the Princess.

"Of course!" said the Queen, rather startled.

"Well, then," said the Princess deliberately, "I think there ought to be a law passed to forbid women to wear anything but swimming clothes, with one exception, which should be you."

"Me!" said the Queen, in offended amazement.

"You look just as nice in your frock as without it," said the Princess, who liked to pay compliments in a neat and dramatic fashion. "The other women seem to lose all the beautiful lines the human form possesses when they put on their clothes. Look at the girl who is diving now, as slippy and as graceful as an eel; but when she puts on a pink blouse and draggy skirt and the hat which I saw in her cubicle she will be a Dowdy Object. Yet how beautiful she looks with her hair in strands across her shoulder and her body undulating as she dives. It is the perfection of movement," said the artistic Princess.

"I think we all look very nice in the water," said the Queen.

"I should like to see my Aunt as a swimmer," said the Princess, who knew perfectly well what was expected of her, but was in a perverse mood. "I should like to see her go down the chute."

"I go down the chute," said the Queen.

"I will look at you if you like," said the Princess kindly.

"Should you really like to see me?" said the Queen, standing out on the diving board most gracefully athletic.

"If you won't spoil my hat," said the Princess. "Not that it matters much now, for a horrid old woman splashed out like a porpoise and blew all over it."

"I won't let you come and see me if you're vulgar," said the Queen, and the Princess apologised and mentioned the price of the hat.

Then the Queen threw herself dashingly onto the top of the chute, and flashed down like a streak of light into the heart of the deep green waters. Pre-

sently the Queen's face came up from the waters all rosy and smiling, and she swam to the side and asked the Princess if she looked perfectly silly.

"You looked like a beautiful shining fish!" said the Princess, with enthusiasm. "And I only wish I could see my Aunt go down it! That would show her her true position in life. Whenever anyone puts on airs and frightens me again, I shall think of them going down the chute head foremost!"

"Did I look so ridiculous?" said the Queen, rather hurt.

"I was only explaining the truest test of the dignity which is natural and not a question of black bombazine. If you can come up from the chute still looking a Queen, I think we may take it your Queenhood is proved for ever. You are a Queen of the water!" said the truthful though flattering Princess. "You dart about in it as beautifully and silently as light. You seem to be part of it, not something thrown in."

"If you please, ladies! Time to dress!" said the Red and Puffing Guardian-of-the-baths; and the Queen took a header into the water and swam off like a wayward flash right up to the farthest end and back, while the Red and Puffing Guardian called out agitatedly, and even ran along the side after the rebellious Queen. Then the Queen came out of the bath, and said in an innocent way, "Is it really time to dress?" and shook the drops from off her shining arms before she disappeared into her cubicle. There she carefully attired herself in all her lace and silken things, while the agitated Guardian stood at the door and chatted heatedly, for distant thunder upon outer gates suggested that a horde of mere men swimmists

were waiting in impatience till the Queen's toilet was finished.

"Now, where shall we go, sweetie?" said the Queen's serene, contented voice, and a radiant vision in grey chiffon and the big black hat with the sweeping feathers swept out of the cubicle, still fastening pins and ribbons.

"I want to talk," said the Princess, making a little face at the Guardian, who bustled on in front of them, still discoursing on the tyranny of Queens.

"No!" said the Queen, in cruel surprise.

Then the Queen kissed the Princess, and said she was a silly little sweetie to look so miserable, but she would graciously grant her an audience. Thereupon the Queen bestowed a radiant smile on the Guardian-of-the-baths, and another equally charming smile upon the commissioner; and then the Queen and the Princess took possession of a hansom, and ordered the obliging driver to drive to the Queen's own palace.

"Now tell me all about it," said the Queen, as the hansom started off with a rattle and a jingle, the horse settled down into swift swinging strides, and the Princess arranged herself in her corner and cast down her eyes in an appropriately melancholy fashion.

"It's more general sadness than anything," said the Princess, peeping into the little square of looking-glass to make sure her expression was properly pensive. "It's a funny thing, but I'm not nearly so happy as I used to be!"

"Perhaps you're in love!" said the Queen, with proportionate gravity.

"Oh, no," said the Princess. "What a ridiculous idea!"

"I hoped you were going to tell me that the

Knight is to be rewarded at last," said the Queen, who was very fond of the Knight, and, indeed, appreciated him much more than the Princess did.

"The Knight is my cousin and the son of his mother," said the Princess, with an impatient movement. "Besides which, he is much too unselfish to wish for a reward. Besides which, he is in love with a Tailor-made Girl who hunts otters. At least, he has been staying at her house for the last week."

"Which proves that he is in love with her, of course," said the Queen. "Well, if it isn't the Knight, is the Slave the cause of the sadness? Or has he been falling in love with someone?"

"I haven't thought of him for days," said the Princess, with disdain. "He can fall in love with the whole female population of the British Isles if he wants to. I've been in love with him once, and I've discovered all his limitations. Besides which, a Princess doesn't trouble her head about slaves. Besides which, I tell you I am not in love!"

"Poor Slave!" said the Queen.

"Oh, he's all right!" said the Princess, with slight impatience. She had long since exhausted the possibilities of the Slave as a topic.

"No! It's no one you know," said the Princess, giving herself away with truly royal prodigality.

A golden ripple of laughter shone in the Queen's eyes.

"Now you have told me," said the Queen.

"I'm not in love," said a rather annoyed Princess.

"It's only someone I've met!"

"Is he very much in love with you?" said the Queen, with the golden ripple still dancing deep within her eyes.

"Good gracious, no!" said the Princess, as pink as a rose. "I've only really spoken to him once, and I never shall see him again. Besides, he's in Uganda."

The Queen touched the Princess's cheek. The Princess had curled herself up, with her arm snuggled into the Queen's. The hansom swung round the corner into Whitehall, and gaily bowled along past immaculate young men streaming out of Government offices.

"He's so absolutely different to the ordinary pink clean Englishman," said the Princess. "He's so very quiet and unconventionally sure of himself. He asked to be in my kingdom, and he writes the nicest letters in the world!"

Something was clenched in the Princess's hand.

"I had one this morning," said the Princess. "It's a most beautiful letter; anyone might read it."

"May I?" said the Queen.

"Oh, anyone could!" said the Princess, with great indifference but rather less conviction. "Of course, the letter is written to me; but you can't understand how different he is from everyone else unless you read it; can you?"

The Princess hesitated a minute; then she suddenly laid the letter in the Queen's hand.

"*Dear little princess,*" read the Queen. She stopped and looked down at the Princess rather severely.

The Princess had the grace to blush a little. "He begins like that," she said quickly, "because I told him all about my kingdom. I know you told me not to talk about it to everybody, but really he overheard

by accident, and so he had to come in. Besides which, it is *my* kingdom, after all!"

The Queen half opened her lips, then saw the mutinous expression on the Princess's face, and read on wisely in silence.

"Your sweet letter was waiting for me when I arrived here. How can I thank you?"

"Oh!" said the Queen.

"I—I had to write," said the Princess. "I'd been so rude."

"Rude?" said the Queen.

"I said I wouldn't write," said the Princess feebly.

"I thought you said you had only seen him once?" said the Queen.

"To talk to," said the Princess propitiatingly.

"And write to," said the Queen, with uplifted eyebrows.

"He quite understood," said the Princess, who did not care for so much comment. "Do go on reading!"

"If you are angry with me for writing as I do," read the Queen, "remember colonial subjects must be expected to feel a greater passion of devotion for their Princess than the lucky people who live near enough to see her every day——"

"It's only the kingdom game," said the Princess, as the Queen stopped again in a horribly surprised fashion. "It's just a *game*!" But she coloured a little more. "I think, after all, I'd rather you didn't read the letter," said the Princess, with an unexpected movement, and the letter again was clenched in the Princess's hand. "Not that it's anything but a game. He's quite happy shooting and exploring and—and engineering, whatever that may be.

That's the worst of it. The really nice strong men are always perfectly happy when they are by themselves. He's not a subject at all. He's only pretending for a little amusement. My letters interest him much as a newspaper from home would do; that's all. He doesn't really care a bit."

"Oh, what an abject princess!" said the Queen.

The Princess sat up indignantly.

"You're always hinting I haven't deep affections!" said the Princess, greatly injured. "Now I'm showing you how deep my affection is, you call me abject!"

"How deep?" said the Queen. "Not so deep but that you can show it to me. It hasn't sunk below the surface yet, I fear."

"It is *most* deep!" said the Princess.

The Queen smiled.

"How deep?" said the Queen again. "So deep that the sunshine can't draw it away? Oh, Princess! I'm afraid it's only a pool by the roadside after all!"

"It's as deep as my love for you," said the Princess.

"It must be deeper than that," said the Queen.

"Then it is," said the Princess. "Oh, I don't know!" And she looked at the Queen, with her calm eyes and the sunbeams hushed within her hair. "Oh, I love you so much!" said the Princess. "I believe I feel happiest with women, after all. With them I can lay down my sword and my armour and just be me. Now with men you must always be on your guard. However you love them, you mustn't tell them, or they feel so shy. It's awfully conceited of them to be so embarrassed, for I am sure I love millions of people most enormously; yet if I tell the Knight——"

"You *must* not make love to people," said the Queen. "How often am I to tell you that?"

"Well, it is hard," said the affectionate Princess. "I am sure sometimes I could just put my arms round the Knight and give him a big hug; I love him so much!"

"You're a perfectly appalling young person!" said a very-much-amused Queen. "Though I must say I can understand your feeling that way to the Knight. He is such a clean and handsome boy."

"It's nothing to do with his looks," said the Princess dreamily. "It's a sort of general love for his character; an awfully nice love really. I should like to give him every single thing he wants to have, even the Tailor-made Girl, if he wants to marry a wife like that. I shouldn't be a bit jealous. I feel sort of protecting and kind, that's all. And yet he's so dreadfully embarrassed, you can't think, when I tell him how I love him!"

"Oh, you do tell him!" said the Queen.

"Not often," said the Princess, in a wheedling manner, for the Queen's blue eyes looked rather lecturefied. "Only when he's particularly knightly. He's my ideal of a knight. I don't think they were very clever in a brilliantly intellectual way; do you?"

"I think the Knight is extremely clever in a sensible way," said the Queen; "but I don't want to discuss his character just now. Do you tell the Slave how much you love him?"

"Now and then," said the Princess airily. "I'm so sorry for him. It must be so uninteresting to be a Slave."

"Then why don't you set him free?" said the Queen.

"I mean uninteresting for him," explained the Princess engagingly. "It's most convenient for me. He took me to lunch to-day," confessed the Princess. "Aunt has come up to town to lunch with the president of the Women's Suffrage League. They're discussing the test question. It's something about votes."

"I saw your Aunt on my way here," said the Queen.

"Yes; well, I said I had shopping to do before I met you, and escaped like that," said the unblushing Princess.

"I don't like you to deceive your Aunt," said an honest Queen.

"Well, lunch is shopping," said the Princess. "You have to pay for it."

"It's the Slave who pays," said the Queen.

"It's all the same," said the Princess. "He's a nice boy!"

"You said you hadn't thought about him for days," said the Queen.

"Well, I haven't," said the heartless Princess. "I've only been *talking* to him to-day. I simply have to try and distract my thoughts when I'm so miserable."

"Miserable!" said the Queen. "Princess, you're a fraud!"

"Really, there's no pleasing you!" said the Princess, with honest indignation. "A minute ago you called me abject, and now when I tell you I've been trying to cheer myself up, you turn on me! What do you want me to be, because I wish you'd decide?"

"Honest with yourself," said the Queen. "You were pretending to be miserable a moment ago."

"Oh, well, I really am a little miserable," said the Princess, with a sudden and effective change of front. "But I love you so much I can't help being happy with you."

"I like you to love me," said the Queen; "but I think you are rather a silly little sweetie to talk of it so much."

"The fault is entirely yours," said the Princess. "I have to keep explaining because you do not seem to understand how valuable and honouring my affection is. It's like this," said the Princess, settling herself comfortably for the particular sort of discussion in which her soul delighted.

The hansom was just turning into the Strand. The Princess knew she had the Queen safe beside her for another ten minutes at least, and she did not desire any more conversation about her own small self at the moment. The Queen was in too lecturey a mood. So the Princess deftly resolved to turn the tables.

"It isn't as if I were one of your slaves, and were simply knocked out of time by your beauty and strongness of mind," said the Princess, with offensive complacency. "What I mean to say is, their homage may be flattering in a tickling, stroking sort of way, but you know you despise them a little. They are so grovelling; they think you have no faults at all. Now I see all your faults," said the Princess triumphantly.

"Oh!" said the Queen.

"Every one," said the Princess firmly. "They are faults on a great scale!"

"Oh, indeed!" said the Queen, and she looked rather haughtily at the critical Princess.

"They are beautiful golden faults. They are the faults of your Queenhood!" said the Princess, with a rush of grandiloquent affection.

"You are not to talk of my Queenhood in that stupid way. You make me very angry!" said the Queen, who possessed stores of common sense beyond the dreams of Princesses. "It's all very well to have a little fun and pretence to ourselves, but when you begin talking about me so absurdly to outsiders, you make me look a perfect idiot!"

"Your face would be one modest blush of satisfaction if you heard how I do talk of you," said the Princess reproachfully, for she had never been loyal to anyone in her life before she met the Queen and brought to the experience all the sensitiveness of a first young passion.

"Yes; and think how disappointed people are when they see me!" said the Queen. "Everything I say or do, they'll be thinking, 'Idiot! Does she think that queenly?' You have no idea what opportunities you give to people for ridiculing yourself and your friends. This is for your good, sweetie, and because I love you!"

"Yes, but you are attaching too much importance now to the opinion of the populace," said the Princess, with dignity. "If people do not kneel down to *me* and acknowledge *my* sovereignty, I simply am good-naturedly amused at their ignorance of etiquette. If they are ill-natured and throw stones, they find themselves suddenly punished in most unexpected and unpleasant ways. If anyone enters the field of ridicule with me, they are doing a fool-

ish thing, for there, in all modesty, I am supreme!"

"You are getting very conceited," said the Queen.
"Rather a spoilt Princess, I'm afraid."

"Oh, indeed, no! I am heaps more sensible and better-tempered than I used to be, I'm sure!" said the Princess, with an affectionate little squeeze. "You and the Jester can smile at me all you like, and patronise me to your own court circle, as you do, you beggars! I know you! But I don't mind how you *talk* of me, because I know in your hearts you love me. And when people truly love me, they may lecture me and make fun of me just as much as they please. I am perfectly aware I present illimitable opportunities to the Jester. But the people who do not like me must be patted and put in their place. You see, I have to *frighten* people into loving me if I can't manage in any other way," said the Princess, with an awe-inspiring scowl.

"Go on with my faults!" said the Queen, giving the Princess a little kiss to show that she was not afraid of her.

"You are even more in love with yourself than I am. I love myself, because I have a sweet nature and love everyone more or less," said the Princess, with a twinkle; "but I do not think myself nearly as attractive as I say I do. I have a very good estimation of my personal worth, and it is not really a very high one. But you have such a beautiful golden nature, you do not even love yourself critically."

"Really!" said the Queen, as astonished as if one of her slaves had suddenly got up and walked out of her kingdom.

"It is a fault in the eyes of the world," said the

Princess, from the top of an enormously lofty altitude. "So I call it a fault, though personally I do not object to it at all. After all, it is so extremely wise to love yourself! It's so stupid to hate one's self or bore one's self or despise one's self! You've got to live with yourself when all's said and done. And if you don't make the best of yourself, it's very disloyal to yourself. Why should you be ashamed of owning you love yourself? I do not mind telling the whole world how extremely amusing, interesting, and on the whole lovable, I find myself. When things go contrariwise, myself is always there to back me up and assure me it doesn't matter. When people call me silly, myself shows me they are equally silly in their own particular way. I am sure I have every reason to be extremely grateful to myself."

"You certainly never forget yourself," said the Queen crushingly, and the hansom came to a block and a standstill.

"Oh, don't I? Ask my Aunt," said the Princess. "Where was I? Oh, talking about your faults. You care a lot more for admiration than I do. You love it; you insist on it."

"Insist?" said the Queen.

"Well, you wouldn't be a real queen if you didn't believe in the majesty of Queenhood," said the Princess. "If some people call it a pose, I say it is a most beautiful one, and it requires all the courage of true royalty to uphold it."

"I always knew your Aunt did not like me," said the Queen.

"She does in her way," said the Princess. "Your sovereignty irritates her at times, because she has the matter-of-fact mind that only realises the avoird-

dupois spirit of Queenhood. If you had had seventy-nine fat stupid Kings and Queens for your forefathers, or possessed all the jewels in the world instead of the most beautiful ones," said the Princess, kissing the Queen's little hand, "then she would have absquatulated before you as flat as the flattest slave. But, as she has a mind that thinks about woman's suffrage, she is not able to see that yours is the truest, most beautiful Queenhood there is, and she resents it."

"She thinks I have a bad influence on you," said the Queen, rather troubled.

"Which is absurd," said the Princess, "as you are the only person in the world who can ever make me ashamed of myself, which is the state of mind in which my Aunt is always wishing me to be."

"I am sorry your Aunt does not love me," said the Queen, still troubled.

"There you are again, you see!" said the Princess. "Troubling about the opinion of the populace."

"I like your Aunt, and I am sorry," said the Queen.

The hansom began to move; then the buses lumbered on and parted, and the hansom shot through, but the Queen's eyes heeded nothing.

"I have said all this," said the Princess, as she drew in her breath with a sigh of ecstasy at being released from bondage and flying through space again, "because I wish you to understand my love and homage are the gifts of a thoroughly independent person, and you do not always seem to understand how you should appreciate this."

"When I saw your Aunt this afternoon, we had an

awfully nice talk together," said the Queen, not even hearing the Princess.

"She calls you an intelligent young woman," said the Princess maliciously; "and as I do not care to play second fiddle to my Aunt, I am going to get out of this hansom."

"Don't be silly!" said the Queen.

"I am going to go the pace," said the Princess firmly, raising her hand to the door. "I'm going to stay up in town and miss my Aunt's train, and dine with the Slave!"

"You are going to do nothing of the sort," said the Queen, holding the Princess's hand. "Because I do not approve of your dining alone with nice-looking young men, even Slaves. And also I want you to stay and have dinner with me."

"I almost think I am offended," said a dignified Princess.

"As a matter of fact, I asked your Aunt if I might keep you to dinner," said the Queen; "and she said you might stay if I saw that you caught the 9.40 train."

"I am sorry," said the Princess, "that you took so much trouble, as I have made other arrangements."

"I am sorry too, said the Queen, "for I had settled in my mind we three would have a charming little dinner all by ourselves."

"I thought you said the Jester was taking the chair at a dinner party?" said the Princess.

"The Poet is coming," said the Queen.

"The Poet!" said the Princess, and could not speak at all.

For the Poet was the Real Poet. He had nothing

to do with the Silly Poets who write the plays the Jester spent his life in sending back, nor was he kin to the Shouting Poet who gave up acting to bang a drum on which is painted emperors and kings and heroes. The Real Poet's books came forth silently like flowers. He was a kind Poet, and offered his flowers politely to a person whom he called the Public, for Real Poets are not selfish, and would rather give their flowers to the Public than keep them themselves, even though they know the Public will never love their flowers as they do.

The Public accepted the flowers, and, if he were in a good temper, said they were rather pretty, but in his heart the Public was much more impressed by the Shouting Poet's drum. And this was foolish of the Public, for a drum that is banged will burst, but the flowers that spring from the heart of a Poet will live for ever.

The Real Poet was the Queen's own royal brother, and the Queen wore a wonderful purple sapphire on her finger as token of the love they bore to one another; but the token which she wore for love of the Jester was only a plain gold ring. The Queen and the Jester and the Poet formed a little triple alliance all to themselves, and the Princess loved the Poet already, although she had never seen him, for of late years he had been journeying in far-distant lands.

"I shall really see him to speak to!" said the Princess. "I can hardly believe in such happiness. I'm so fearfully happy!"

"Not even the least bit miserable?" said the Queen.

"Not the least littlest bit in the world," said the romantic and impressionable Princess.

“And you think your arrangements will permit of your staying?” said the rather teasing Queen.

“A real Queen would forgive me,” said the Princess.

So the Queen forgave the Princess, and the hansom drew up in the courtyard of the palace, and the Princess and the Queen went in together.

IV.

THE POET.

“**H**IS face is as beautiful as his verses, but his soul looks tired. I am a little disappointed,” thought the Princess.

The Princess and the Poet were sitting at the dinner-table of the Queen. Dinner was over, and purple grapes and rosy peaches were piled upon the table. Candles burned among the silver and the roses, and made an oasis of fairy lights and colours in the shadowy room. Through the open windows came the whispering sound of leaves against the windows, and farther off the endless roar of traffic came up from the streets beyond the courtyard. The soft flames of the candles shone on the beautiful Queen. Trailing silken draperies fell from her shoulders and lay on the ground in fold on fold. She leant a little forward as she talked, her arms upon the table, a cigarette in her white fingers, while fairy wreaths drifted from her sweet lips; it was the very poetry of smoking.

But to-night the Princess's gaze was fixed upon the Poet. His face was very pale, and his eyes veiled beneath drooping eyelids.

“He is like a Knight of the Dolorous Forest,” thought the poetical Princess. “Seeking and seeking, and never finding. Even when he smiles, the

shadow of the trees is on him. He looks as mysterious as the moonlight, and as sad, and unapproachable. We may dream of him, and worship him, but we haven't the same happy feeling we have in the sun," thought the Princess, and turned to look at the Queen.

Oh, the beautiful Queen! She was as golden and serene as a summer's noon. Her eyes were as blue as the skies, and her smile as sweet as the breath of a rose. Summer and sunshine and roses in one.

"What are you thinking of, Princess?" said the Queen.

"I have been wondering how the Poet's books can be so fresh, when he looks so tired," said the Princess honestly; and the Poet laid down his cigarette with a slightly startled expression.

"In your verses," said the Princess, gazing curiously at the Poet, "even when you feel saddest, you seem to be able to sit back and see how beautiful and interesting sadness is. You own your feelings instead of your feelings owning you, so you ought never to be uncomfortably miserable; yet there are lines and lines of sadness on your face. Now, isn't that strange?" and the Princess gazed upon the Poet as if she were observing some interesting new fact in natural history.

"I want so much from life," said the Poet, with a smile that was half a sigh; "more than it will ever give me."

"You want too much," said the Queen. "You are nothing but a big spoilt baby!"

"You are not to call him that," said the Princess, who believed in the little ceremonies of court life, especially in the ceremonies of hero-worship. "This

is a court dinner, and you are not to be disrespectful!"

"A court dinner?" said the Poet.

"I haven't told the Poet of our kingdoms," said the Queen, with an amused little smile at the Poet and the Princess, for the Poet was just as fond of playing make-believe as the Princess herself, and the Queen knew no one would enjoy their fairyland game more than the Poet. It is a curious thing, but an absolute fact, that Poets never grow old.

"I am a Beggar Princess at present," explained the Princess, telling about herself first, of course, "for my kingdom hasn't hailed me yet. I'm only knocking at its portals; but when I can make myself heard the gates will swing open, and the populace will come forth to greet me, and my rags will be changed into cloth of gold, and everyone will declare me to be the most wonderful Princess in the world. And well they may, for I shall be able to show everyone themselves in such an attractive light, that they will be perfectly delighted, and yet even their enemies will have to acknowledge my picture to be a faithful one. That is a very special gift, isn't it?"

"She has all the modesty of royalty, you see," said the Queen, with a sly little laugh at the Poet.

"Of course," said the Princess, "only royal people know that I am royal at present. The Queen knows, because she is a queen."

"Am I knocking at the portals of my kingdom?" said the Queen.

"Oh, no, no, no!" said the Princess. "The gates of your kingdom sprung open directly you touched them; the people did not cry out and make a clamour when you entered, because wherever you pass there is

always rest. I assault, and take by storm, and make a fearful noise; but with you, the people bow down and worship without knowing it."

"As I am a Queen's brother, I must have a kingdom too," said the Poet, who was not uninterested in his own personality.

"Oh, no, you haven't," said the autocratic Princess. "You are too great for human kingdoms; and besides, Poets must not have responsibilities. It is for Kings and Queens to honour you. You pass through all the kingdoms of the world, and make each beautiful."

"That is very sweet of you," said the Poet. "Then while I am in your kingdom, you must command me, Princess."

"Oh, may I?" said the Princess, and looked first at the Poet and then at the Queen, with all the hush of rapturous expectancy in her voice and shining eyes.

"I know what I should like better than anything in the world," said the Princess, and she bent forward and whispered to the Queen. "Do you think he would talk about his books?" said the Princess.

"Reticent and modest as poets are by nature, I think it is just barely possible we might persuade him," said the Queen, with a wicked little twinkle. "Do you hear, dear Poet? Is it possible that you could be lured into talking about your books?"

Then the Poet, who was unlike the Silly Poets, in that he knew and made fun of his little weaknesses, laughed out like a boy, and mentioned gaily that he had a beautiful brand-new poem in his pocket.

"If we could *possibly* persuade you to read it!" said the Queen, and paused mischievously.

"You are *not* to make fun!" said the Princess,

whose awe of a Real Poet had not yet worn off to any great degree.

"You're a silly little sweetie," said the Queen, as she rose from the table and took her seat on the sofa by the fireplace. A tall lamp stood beside it, and made a patch of light around the Queen. The Princess pulled down most of the cushions, and piled them on the floor and settled herself comfortably against the Queen. The Queen took up her knitting and went on with a wonderful baby's jacket for a little newcomer to a distant subject; and the Princess heard the soft click-click of the knitting needles, and felt soothed and rested.

Then the Poet read his verses, and the Queen laid down her knitting as he read, and the Princess gazed up at him and wondered if life had any further happiness in store for her after this. For it is not given even to princesses to hear Real Poets read verses very often.

And then the Poet talked of the other poets—Silly Poets, and Shouting Poets, and the few Real Poets—and the Princess found he saw the beautiful side of people ever so much more beautifully and cleverly than she did herself. For the Real Poet had something sweet and generous to say of the poorest Silly Poets, at whom the Princess scoffed unmercifully; and as for the Shouting Poet, why, the Real Poet was absolutely angry with the Princess when she laid down her very definite opinion as to the value of a drum.

This seemed all the more wonderful to the Princess, because the Silly Poets and the Shouting Poets took every opportunity they could of throwing stones at the Real Poet, and affected to despise him for the

very kind-heartedness which had made him do his best to help them in their struggles up the hill of fame.

Altogether it was a wonderful evening.

"I almost think *I* shall write a book," said the Princess, who was not troubled with any undue lack of confidence in her abilities. "It would be more like a picture than a book—a picture of the people I love. It would be a most charming book, because everyone in it would be nice; and the whole world would read it, and love the people in it as much as I do!"

"Most charming of all princesses!" said the Poet. "You cannot be delicious enough to imagine that any of the people you write of in a book will ever speak to you again?"

"Of course I should only put nice things in about them," said the Princess.

"And do you think you will ever be able to satisfy them?" said the Poet. "Because I have tried myself."

"Surely one's self is sacred?" said the Queen. "We should not like any butcher's boy or housemaid to pay their shillings——"

"They are disgustingly chary of their shillings," murmured the Poet.

"To hear us speaking to our friends," said the Queen. "We would not ask them into our drawing-room, to know us as we know each other."

"Ah, you are such an aristocrat," said the Poet.

"I think it would be very good for butchers' boys to know you, even if they might only know you in a book," said the Princess.

"The Queen would never be satisfied," said the

Poet, with a twinkle, as he lay back in his chair and watched the smoke-wreaths floating through the window.

"She would in my book," said the Princess.

"She would think there was not enough about her in it," said the Poet, looking under his eyelids at the Queen in a brotherly manner.

"Well, anyhow, there would be one person who would be pleased with the portrait," said the Princess; "and that would be myself!"

"I used to write about myself," said the Poet, "but I never found it possible to do myself justice. However anxious you are to draw a faithful portrait, it is almost impossible to refer to your own beautiful eyes with the carelessness which alone is convincing."

"I should do it," said the Princess royally. "At least, I should make the other people in the book mention to me that I had beautiful eyes."

"Granting that you are utterly shameless, which, as you are a lady, I must grant you," said the Poet, with old-fashioned courtesy, "even then I think you would find it difficult to refer to your own modesty."

"I do not consider modesty either a virtue or a charm," said the Princess. "Modesty either means that you are stupid, and know it; or else that you are clever, and pretend you don't know it, which is hypocrisy; or else that you are clever, and really don't know it, in which case you must be perfectly idiotic," concluded the Princess simply.

"It's perfectly idiotic to *talk* so much about being clever, sweetie," said the Queen, who always administered her pills in liberal helpings of jam.

"Yes; shouldn't I be appalling as a lady novelist?" said the Princess, entirely concurring with the

Queen. "Just think, if my conceit were printed! Though there would be some reason for my conceit, because I should take care to write books that were healthy, humorous, true to life, original and interesting. I should put that sentence in a book if I wrote one," said the Princess kindly. "It would be something for the critics to pick out and hang their claws in. The clever, nice critics would say how true it was; the unkind critics, like the *Saturday Review*, could take it as a text for the weekly sermon on the impudence of women. I should put it in as a test of the moral character of critics. It would just show up their lack of kindheartedness or otherwise."

"I do hope you never talk like this, except to us, who understand you!" said the Queen, whose mission in life was to make the Princess wise.

"I am sure no nice person would really dislike me when they'd read it," said the Princess, still pondering on the excitement afforded in the fields of literature. "It would be very mean of them if they did, for I should only have been trying to amuse them and brighten them up a bit. Of course, my Aunt would say I had made a fool of myself; but that is nothing new—it is almost worth while making a fool of yourself to watch the effect on my Aunt!"

"I like to try the effect of myself on people," said the Poet, who had nearly as honest an admiration for his own personality as the Princess had for hers. "I should rather like to try it on your Aunt."

"You would not try it on long," said the Princess. "My Aunt is the most literal person I ever met."

"I would take her in the forest by moonlight, and show her where the dryads hide," said the Poet dreamily.

"She would at once send for a doctor and tell him you had delusions," said the Princess.

"Not if I could show her where the dryads hide," said the Poet, still in the beautiful dreamy voice.

"If she did not send for a doctor, it would simply be because she thought you too silly to take any trouble about you," said the rather frank Princess.

The Poet looked at the Princess as if he did not think he were being respected quite enough.

"She would think you shockingly immoral," said the Queen, with haste.

"Then I must certainly meet this Aunt," said the Poet, cheered by the Queen's kind words, for he loved nothing so much as talking to people who thought him immoral.

"She would be more embarrassed than shocked," said the Princess, trying in vain to imagine her Aunt and the Poet together.

"There is nothing which gives one such innocent healthy amusement as embarrassing people," said the Poet.

"It is so easy to embarrass my Aunt," said the Princess, with a touch of contempt, "that I derive no pleasure from it at all. It is much more difficult to embarrass me."

"It would be so difficult, I should not dream of attempting it," said the wise and experienced Poet, smiling down at the Princess.

"I was more hinting it would be rather a waste if you made love to my Aunt," said the Princess coaxingly.

"Princess!" said the Queen.

"It's no use telling me my Aunt would care for it," said the Princess, affecting innocent unconscious-

ness of the Queen's restraining glance. "She cannot enjoy anything that is enjoyable at all."

"She enjoys different things from you," said the Queen, "but she enjoys them as much in her way."

"She does not enjoy things one quarter as much," declared the Princess.

"She has much greater joy in her dinner than you have," said the Queen.

"And great as is the ecstasy, so is the pain," murmured the Poet.

"You mean she has indigestion?" said the Princess serenely.

"One can have a surfeit of sadness," said the Poet.

"Well, the extraordinary thing is that I *never* am miserable," said the Princess.

"Never?" said the Queen, and looked down from her knitting with a reminiscent smile.

"Never for more than one minute," said the Princess. "And I enjoy being sympathised with so much, I find it enjoyable to be miserable."

"Oh, Princess!" said the Queen, and she touched the Princess's cheek with her soft hand. "How deep is the pool, now the sunshine has come?"

"Talking about my book," said the Princess, kissing the Queen's hand and deftly changing the conversation. "All my relations would think it a very silly book. I don't know if you've noticed, but if you say beautiful things about the people you love to your relations——"

"Who, I presume, do not come under that category," said the Poet.

"Of course I love my relations," said the Princess, dimpling; "but it's not a critical love. I'm talking

of the people I choose to love, because they are beautiful, or clever, or amusing, or poets——”

“So sweet of you!” murmured the Poet. “Even with the inference——”

“Oh, dear, where was I?” said the distracted Princess, and she turned her face up to the Queen. “Now, suppose I were talking of you to my Aunt, and I said, ‘The Queen’s hair looked as golden as corn in the sunshine, and her eyes were as blue as forget-me-nots in the corn, and her hands were like daisies——?’”

“Don’t be so utterly ridiculous!” said the Queen, rather pleased all the same.

“There!” said the Princess, in triumph. “Just what my Aunt would say! But suppose I said, ‘The Queen isn’t a bad-looking woman, but she must put something on her hair to make it shine like that; and it’s absurd for a woman to dress in such artistic gowns. Why doesn’t she buy gowns that look *smart* from Marshall and Snelgrove’s?’ And if I went on to say, ‘It’s perfectly ridiculous for anyone to take such care of their hands, and I don’t think she’s really very pretty, after all,’ that would be considered a nice sensible conversation.”

“I wonder why we don’t find censure as ridiculous as worship? We never despise a cynic, but the man who burns incense to the beautiful is always thought a poet or a fool—which terms, by the bye, I have always found to be considered synonymous,” said the Poet, with a touch of reminiscence in his voice. “Yet one need only be clever to see faults, but one must be wise to see beauty in everything.”

“I am clever, and you and the Queen are wise,” said the Princess humbly.

"You dear little sweetie, you see everything golden!" said the Queen.

"You are rather dear," said the Poet, gazing with charming appreciation at the Princess.

"Oh!" said the Princess, slightly shocked.

"Why not?" said the Poet, with a cousinly smile.

The Princess could not think of an answer. The Poet's eyes were smiling more and more, a wicked twinkle played about them. The Princess looked out of the window, and imagined she appeared careless and easy.

"Why should I not say you are rather dear?" said the Poet, flicking his cigarette daintily into the mouth of a china rabbit.

"How can you know?" said the Princess, rather pink. "You have only met me once."

"Like the Man from Uganda," said the Queen.

"Who's the Man from Uganda?" said the Poet, with cousinly interest.

"Oh, just someone I met," said the Princess quickly, and keeping up the careless manner.

"So I gathered. Were you angry with him?" said the Poet.

"Fearfully!" said the Princess.

Then the Poet laughed, and the Princess felt a wish to sink into the ground.

"Don't tease her!" said the Queen, and laid her cool hand against the Princess's flushed cheek.

"I am not in the least teased," said the untruthful Princess. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking what a pity it is that all the disagreeable, discontented people in the world cannot suddenly be flashed into this dear shadowy room! Then everyone in the world

would be at peace," and the Princess congratulated herself on the way she had escaped from *that* little quagmire.

"I shouldn't be," said the fastidious Queen.

"Oh, dear!" said the Princess, with a sigh; "it is so sad to think that, however kind we wish to be, we can never make the unhappy people one half as happy as we make each other. If anyone came into this room, even the Jester, it wouldn't be quite so nice."

"It would be much nicer," said the Queen. "And if you talk about the Jester like that, I shan't love you one bit."

"I love to have you and the Jester, or the Jester by himself," said the Princess, rather hurt. "I love him with my whole heart, I am sure. But you and he and the Poet are such an inseparable trio, that, pretend as hard as I can that we are a quartette, I know in my heart that you are the trio that is making the beautiful music of sympathy, and I am only a lonely listener or beater of time, graciously admitted by your kindness, and there are dozens of friends and sisters and relations who could take my place."

"You do belong to us, and we are a quartette," said the Queen, who always tried to make people happy, at the sacrifice sometimes of a little truth. The Poet raised his delicate eyebrows the merest fraction. Like most great artists, he felt he should play a solo rather than in trios or quartettes.

"Besides, other people are not royal," said the Queen, stroking the serious look away from the Princess's forehead.

"We are nice, aren't we?" said the Princess, with a satisfied sigh. "And yet there are lots

of people who misjudge the Poet, and even you; and millions of people who misjudge me. Oh, I wish all those people could know us as we are this minute! If they could only come in, and understand."

"Oh, Princess! Always playing to the gallery," said the Queen. "What does it matter what the gallery thinks?"

"Don't you think that everyone has an equally nice side when they are in their proper element?" said the Poet. "I like to think that the most insignificant road-scraper has his own little kingdom somewhere, where he reigns a happy little monarch in his own, right, element."

"Yes, it's the different elements that clash, rather than the different people," said the Princess. "If I were on a desert island with any person on this earth, I believe in two days we would love each other."

"Let us find a desert island, dear Princess!" said the Poet.

"I did not mean *fall in love*," said the Princess, trying, as was proper, to infuse a common-sensible air into the conversation. "My heart is quite atrophied, from an excess of dis-use!"

"From over-use," said the Queen, who was possessed of the erroneous idea that the Princess fell in love as often as she said she did.

"If you please!" said the pretty voice of the Queen's own royal maid, and the Queen laid down her knitting and begged to be excused for just one moment.

The Poet came back from the door and stood beside the open window. The moonlight shone on his face and made a dusky aureole of his hair. His

eyes looked down into the shadowy depths of the tree-tops; the tired lines had vanished.

"He is only a boy after all," thought the Princess. "I am not falling in love in the least, but he is very nice-looking. And so puzzling. One minute he seems old and so wise, and the next he is like a child. I wonder which is the real him!"

"London!" said the Poet, as he watched the lights of the shops and lamps, that twinkled in like stars among the leaves. "Listen to the traffic drifting past. Why, the very heart of the city is beating round us. Isn't it wonderful?"

"And we sit up here in the palace," said the Princess, who liked this sort of conversation better than anything in the world. "So high that only the stars are above us."

The Poet looked at the Princess rather curiously.

"I think we must try the effect of ourselves upon each other," said the Poet, wondering if it would be interesting to make love to the Princess.

"I am sure I should enjoy it," said the Princess, who knew perfectly well what the Poet was thinking, and did not feel so afraid of him now he was on the brink of descending to a human and approachable level. "I should like to try every sort of love there is, on every sort of person."

"How lightly you talk of love!" said the Poet, looking down on the Princess in a curious way, as if she were a child, instead of the experienced lady she was, of course.

"It is the fault of the language," said the Princess. "There are millions of kinds of love, you know, though there is only one word for them all."

"You approach the subject in a very intelligent

spirit," said the Poet, extremely amused, and he crossed to the sofa and sat down by the Princess.

"It is the right spirit," said the Princess, looking up at the Poet confidently. "I want to learn."

"I wonder if I could teach you anything?" said the Poet, and his eyes made love to the Princess in the most poetical manner imaginable.

"I am sure you could," said the Princess. "I learn something new from every person I meet."

The Poet looked as if the Princess were scarcely showing sufficient gratitude.

"But I have never learnt from a Poet," said the Princess sweetly. "I should not think of this experience as a lesson. It would be a 'prose fancy' all of my own."

"When will you come and dine with me?" said the Poet.

"*Can* I really?" said the Princess, with a little gasp of happiness. "With the Queen?"

"Oh, the Queen would spoil it," said the Poet, with a twinkle.

"What are you talking about?" said the Queen, coming back into the room.

"Is the Princess a young lady who will be allowed to dine with Poets?" said the Poet meekly.

"Good gracious, no!" said the Queen, and sat down in the Poet's vacated place on the sofa and took up her knitting.

"I never do the things I am allowed to, I never care to," said the Princess, smiling consolingly on the Poet as he leant against the chimney-piece.

"You will never in this world be allowed to dine with the Poet," said the Queen firmly, as she counted her stitches.

"But we are all of royal family," said the Poet, "Queens and Kings and Princesses and Poets. Surely one is allowed to dine with one's own relations?"

"We will certainly dine together," said the Princess, with firmness equal to the Queen's. Then the Princess withdrew guilty eyes from the clock and murmured she must fly for her train.

"My dearest child," said the Queen, "you'll never catch it! Oh, why didn't I remind you?"

"I saw it was time to go before you went out of the room," said the Princess honestly. "But it has been well worth staying." Then she kissed the Queen. "He is perfectly sweet!" whispered the romantic Princess. "Oh, I have enjoyed myself!"

"You will miss your train, though," said the Queen, very troubled to think she had broken her word to the Aunt.

"It's the most extraordinary thing, but I always do miss trains; it's quite getting into a habit," said the Princess benignly, as the Poet tucked her into her coat in a brotherly way.

"I am going to take you to the station," said the Poet.

"I really would rather you met my Aunt under happier circumstances," said the Princess. "The fact is, she is now waiting at the station, and in the quickest hansom I can hope to find I am afraid I have missed my train by more than twenty minutes."

"Oh, what *will* she say?" said the Queen.

"Goodness knows!" said the Princess. "If I stay much longer you will hear for yourself, because she will certainly come to see what has happened! Good-bye!"

"Remember you have promised to dine with me," said the Poet.

"I have given you my word," said the Princess royally. Then the Princess flew off in her hansom to her long-departed train.

V.

THE JESTER.

I HAVE come to say good-bye to the Queen," said the Princess, bursting in upon the Jester. "Oh, I am so sorry," said the Jester. "The Queen is out!"

"Oh, dear!" said the Princess. "I'm going away for all the summer. My Aunt has taken a house near Cookham, and we're all going down to-morrow. She sprung it on us last night. I must see the Queen, to tell her."

"Do sit down," said the Jester. "She'll be sure to be in to lunch."

So the Princess sat down on the Queen's sofa. She felt very pleased, but a little frightened, at finding the Jester in, for the Princess was never quite certain when he was laughing at her. However, it was such a very special occasion, that the Princess had to wait to see the Queen. Six months had passed since the Princess had dined with the Queen and the Poet, and now it was early summer; and the Princess's Aunt had decided that London air was not good for young people, and was bundling the Princess off and shutting up her London flat in the very middle of the season.

The Jester had turned round to the desk, and was piling up heaps of papers and brown-colored manuscripts into some sort of order.

"I do hope I'm not interrupting you," said the

Princess, feeling almost unimportant beside such a show of work and worry.

"Thank God for it!" said the Jester piously. "I've been reading plays." He banged down a fat black exercise book on to the top of the pile, then he tumbled down the lid of the desk and shut them all in.

"That's finished!" said he.

"Oh, I don't think I ought to have interrupted!" said the Princess, rather frightened.

"I am quite sure you oughtn't—that's why I'm so thankful to you," said the Jester. "It's a most singular thing, but whenever I'm simply bursting to play golf, just as I'm getting my sticks together the Queen always happens along. 'What about the plays you have promised to read?' says she. 'The pile's getting no smaller! Ten came yesterday. Now you have a nice *free* morning.'"

The Jester screwed up his funny little face.

"If I ever get punished for my sins," said he, "I shall spend the next life reading plays."

The Jester's business was to make laughter for the great fat person who was called the Public. Late at night, when the Public had finished his work and had eaten and drunk himself into a comatose condition, the fat Public would command the little Jester to amuse him; and the poor little Jester would dance and jest till the Public shook his great sides with laughter; but, however hard the Jester worked, the grasping Public would ask for more. Directly the Public's fat back was turned, the Jester would make a grimace at him, but he did not dare to do this to the Public's face. Instead, he had to bow very low and smile and smile, as if there were nothing he loved so much as being able to amuse the Public.

"Oh, dear me, how the Public laughed at you to-night! How proud you must be!" people would say to him.

"It is a proud mission," the Jester would answer, with a solemn twinkle, and all the unsuccessful jesters would envy him. But the Jester's heart would have broken if the Queen had not pitied him.

Now the Jester's ugly little face wrinkled up into a grin, and he squatted on the hearthrug and looked up at the Princess.

"It's a disgusting, horrible world," said the Jester.

"Oh, come!" said the Princess. "You've done very well in it."

"I could wish my dearest enemy nothing worse than to live," said the Jester. "I am the unhappiest person I know."

"Nonsense!" said the Princess. "Think of all the Jesters who cannot win a hearing from the Public. To say nothing of those who, when they have pushed and struggled and got before him——"

"Silly fools!" said the Jester.

"You did it yourself," said the Princess.

"I thought the Public rather a fine sort of chap in those days," said the Jester. "I didn't know him then."

"He has been very kind to you," said the Princess. "Think of the Jesters who only get whipped for their pains. Success is nice, even if you only succeed with the Public."

"It's so easy to make him laugh," said the Jester. "You have only to tumble down. If you tumble down twice, he yells; and if you can possibly manage to hurt yourself, he has an epileptic fit."

"Oh, you're silly!" said the Princess. "You ought to be the happiest person in the world, when you have a Queen to love you."

"The Queen is wonderful," said the Jester; "she is almost worth living for."

Then the Jester scrambled up from the rug and went to the desk. He loved the Queen too much to talk of her.

"Talking of plays," said the Jester, "I came across rather a nice silly little play to-day. It's most frightfully silly, of course. You can see that by the cover," and the Jester held up some yellowed sheets in a tattered binding which looked as if all the jesters in the city had thrown it in scorn from one to the other.

"Who wrote it?" said the Princess.

"Some ridiculous poet," said the Jester, "who is also a mountebank—an unsuccessful mountebank. Yet, all the same, there are some rather sweet lines in it."

"What's it about?" said the Princess.

"A poor mad fool," said the Jester. "Most Silly Poets make Love a rosy laughing little chap that one no more respects than one does a naked baby, but this Silly Poet makes the touch of the baby bring madness. Just think! One minute you're a man, with your strength and work and hopes, and the next a fool, yoked with hogs and beasts, for everyone to punch and kick and grin at; and all through the touch of a rosy baby."

"Oh, dear!" said the Princess. "What a horrible way to talk of love!"

"Oh, well," said the Jester. "He's not such a bad little chap. When he's broken your heart, he

does leave you alone, not like the Public. *He* never does."

"Love hasn't broken your heart," said the Princess.

"He had a jolly good try," said the Jester, with a grin. "Fancy me looking up to a queen. I'm quite certain he thought he was doing for me."

"But the Queen was so great!" said the Princess happily.

"I'll sing you the fool's song," said the Jester, hopping off for his lute. The lute had seven strings, and wanted a lot of tuning.

Then the Jester squatted down at the Princess's feet, and sang:

"THE FOOL'S SONG.

"Love the merryman comes, and I

Fal lal lal lal lal la!

Laugh now, ladies, soon you'll sigh!

Fal lal lal lal lal la!

Though we come in cheerful guise,

Laughing lips and mocking eyes,

In our pathway sorrow lies—

Fal lal lal lal lal la!

"Fortune's wheel we twist awry,

Fal lal lal lal lal la!

As the spokes go whirling by,

Fal lal lal lal lal la!

Poke our fingers through and through,

Soon will snap the wheel in two!

What will you poor ladies do?

Fal lal lal lal lal la!

"Broken hearts you cannot mend,

Fal lal lal lal lal la!

So we come unto the end,

Fal lal lal lal lal la!

You are sighing! What care we?
Love and I from sighs are free.
Cupid's fools! Come dance with me,
Fal la! la! la! la! la! la!"

"Not so much in it as I thought," said the Jester misanthropically.

"I suppose it is silly," said the Princess; "but I rather like it. What is the plot of the story?"

"It is the plot that Silly Poets think the most original, tragical, and generally the best plot in the world," said the Jester. "I know this is so, because every Silly Poet who sends me his first play (bless him!) uses it."

"I thought you liked the play!" said the Princess, in surprise.

"Good gracious! no," said the Jester. "There's not a penny in it. The Public would have gone to sleep before we got to the song, which is the only decent thing in it. And if by some extraordinary fluke the Public did manage to keep his fat eyes open to the end, he would kick me off the stage and give me no dinner for weeks and weeks and weeks. For the play has a sad ending; it might also make him think for two minutes, and the Public's much too healthy and fat to think. The only thing it appreciates is when you tickle its sides or scratch its fat back," said the Jester viciously. "Or, if you really want to make it happy and be sure of your dinner for ever, bring it a nice mud bath and let it have a jolly good wallow."

"Why do you say *it?*" said the Princess. "The Public's a person."

"In strict confidence," said the Jester, "it's only

an animal. A **great, fat, red, stupid, apoplectic, disgustingly unctuous animal!** ”

“ Oh, but it’s so healthy,” said the Princess.

“ There is no more healthy creature in the world,” said the Jester, “ than a well-fed pig.”

“ The Public has a good heart,” said the Princess.

“ And if he is so stupid, why do all the clever people try to please him? And why are Silly Poets so very disappointed when he takes no notice of them? ”

“ Poets must have dinners,” said the Jester.

“ Once on a time the Public was tickled and scratched to such an extent that it blinked a good-natured eye on a poet, and gave him a house and a mulberry-tree, and a twopenny-halfpenny crown made of laurels.”

“ Shakespeare? ” said the Princess.

“ I’m sick of his name,” said the Jester. “ However, the Public got a character for appreciation then, and ever since all the Silly Poets have been hoping they’ll get on his soft side too.”

“ Will anyone succeed again? ” said the Princess.

The Jester winked.

“ The Shouting Poet with the drum has done it,” he said confidentially. “ Of course you know what makes the biggest noise? ”

“ What? ” said the Princess.

“ Wind,” said the Jester solemnly.

“ Oh, well, anyone can bang drums,” said the Princess. “ Why don’t more people do it? ”

The Jester winked again.

“ This poet has collared the drum,” said the Jester, “ and he’s got it slick up against the ear of the Public; and he’s making such a row the Public can’t hear anyone else. Besides, even the Public, with all its

soul for music, bless it! can't stand more than one drum at a time."

"I rather like drums myself," said the Princess.

"Lor' bless you! so do I," said the Jester. "I don't grudge the Shouting Poet his house and the mulberry tree, but his crown will have to be made from the mulberry leaves."

"But he can sit in the house and wear it," said the Princess; "so I dare say it will last his time."

"Of course, as he doesn't deserve it," said the Jester, suddenly remembering to be misanthropic.

"He deserves it as much as anyone else," said the Princess. "I think he's rather a smart poet to have collared the drum."

"Drums give me a headache," said the Jester, hugging himself morosely. "They are the most disgusting, tawdry, meretricious instruments on earth."

"They are used on battlefields," said the Princess.

"Is there anything more disgusting than a battlefield?" said the Jester.

"You're extremely unpatriotic," said the Princess.

"Patriotic humbug!" said the Jester. "How can the Public hear me when it's listening to beastly drums?"

"Then you *do* care if he hears you?" said the Princess.

"There are really lots of sweet lines in this play," said the Jester, suddenly very absorbed in the manuscript. Then he took up one of the big flat envelopes that lay on the desk.

"What are you doing?" said the Princess.

"Sending it back," said the Jester. "Lie still, can't you!" and he tried to pat down the poor little

curled-up leaves. "I only wish the Silly Poet would let you."

"You're not going to send it back without a word!" said the Princess, perfectly amazed at such hard-heartedness.

The Jester began to write the address on the envelope.

"Why not?" said the Jester. "It's no use to me or anyone else, as even a Silly Poet's thick head should be learning by now."

"I think you might write just one little line to say that you liked it," said the Princess coaxingly.

"My goodness! Then he'd send me all his plays," said the Jester.

"There might be a good one amongst them *all*," said the Princess.

"There are *no* good plays," said the Jester, and he stuck down the flap of the envelope. "You know the first thing that must happen before you can begin to write a play?"

"What?" said the Princess, greatly interested.

"You must be a blithering idiot!" said the Jester. Then he threw the envelope on the big pile that was already waiting for the post.

"If I ever am rewarded for my virtues," he said winningly, "I shall spend my time in the next life wringing the necks of all the dear, kind, thoughtful people who send me their plays!"

"It's a shame, and I shall write to the poor Silly Poet," thought the Princess, and she peeped at the address on the envelope to make a mental note.

"You will do nothing so silly," said the Jester, who always knew what everyone was thinking.

"I shall do exactly what I like," said the Princess.

"You'll only get yourself into trouble if you do," said the Jester. "It's most unwise to write to men whom you don't know. I know this mountebank, and he's not nice, really!"

"A kind act like that could not be misconstrued," said the Princess.

"Oh, yes, it could be, by a mountebank," said the Jester.

"You are a mountebank yourself, and you are a perfect dear," said the Princess.

"You're a perfect little duffer," said the Jester. "You're not to write to this man."

The Princess smiled provokingly.

"You write the most extraordinarily silly letters in this world," said the Jester.

"I will never write to you again," said the Princess, with royal anger in her eyes.

"Yes, you will," said the Jester. "You will write to me to tell me I was right about this mountebank chap."

"I don't understand you," said the Princess. "I thought you said I was not to write to him?"

"You don't suppose I flatter myself you'll take any notice?" said the Jester. "Of course you'll write to him, and he'll write back, and you'll worry your soul out to help him and make my life a perfect nuisance."

"I shan't come near you," said the Princess.

"That's a promise," said the Jester.

"Certainly, I promise," said the Princess, with enormous dignity. "I shall sympathise with the poor Silly Poet, but I shan't worry you about him."

"Oh, how he will hate you then!" said the Jester.

"You make the whole world seem detestable," said the Princess.

"It is," said the Jester; "the world behind the curtain."

"Then how is it you are so nice?" said the Princess.

"I am a hard-hearted little wretch, if you only knew," said the Jester.

"You are a perfect darling," said the Princess.

"You have no business to tell me, if I am," said the Jester, suddenly skimming up to the top of a dizzy ladder of propriety. "What would your Aunt say?"

"The Queen thinks as I do," said the Princess, in no way abashed; "and she's always right."

"I'm not fit to touch the hem of her gown," said the Jester, tumbling flat in the dust with the ladder on top of him. "I'm a mean, backbiting, disgusting, morbid, miserable, hard, cruel"—the Jester thumped all the envelopes till they jumped off the table—"blithering little ass," said the Jester, going down on his knees to pick up the envelopes. "My whole life is spent in blighting the hopes of sensitive young poets," said the Jester, sitting literally in the dust.

"You go down on your knees to pick them up again," said the Princess; "and you know the poets love you even when you send their plays back."

"They only pretend to. It's a world of falsehood," said the Jester, not meaning it in the least.

"You only pretend to be miserable for what *you* can get," said the Princess firmly.

"I get nothing I want," said the Jester.

"Oh!" said the Princess.

The Jester had the grace to look a little ashamed.

"What's the good of loving the Queen, when I'm such a silly little chap?" he said. "Now, if I were a whacking big soldier——"

"You'd bore her to death," said the Princess. "You're a whacking big fraud!"

"Oh, you know too much!" said the Jester, hopping up with the envelopes and taking a comfortable seat somewhere near the bottom of the ladder. "*I shall* roar when your kingdom's taken from you!"

"What do you know about my kingdom?" said the Princess, rather pink.

"Everything the Queen does, of course," said the Jester, with a twinkle.

"You don't mean to say she's told you?" said the Princess, more than half inclined to be angry.

"You don't mean to say that you weren't going to have me in it?" said the Jester, in his most plaintive and effective manner.

"You're in the Queen's kingdom," said the Princess; "but any way, I'd never let you into mine. You are the most depressing person I ever met in my life!"

"I might have known I shouldn't be in your kingdom," said the Jester, with resignation, "for the simple reason that I wanted to be in it."

"Yes, but if I let you in, you wouldn't want to be in," said the Princess, who understood the Jester pretty well.

"Ah, wait till the doors of your swagger kingdom are shut in your face," said the Jester. "Then, when you're wandering about all alone in the cold, you will come across me huddling in my corner; and we'll build a little fire, and sit over it, and talk to each other about the disgustingness of the world."

"If I were ever miserable, you would be the last person on this earth I should talk to," said the Princess, with conviction.

"I think you're a pig," said the Jester. "When I am in trouble, I find myself more sympathetic than anyone I know. However, I don't want to come into your beastly court! I shall have a little kingdom of my own. And a crown, with a feather in it! My kingdom will be a much more expensive one than yours. I shan't know you!"

"Of course, these airs and pretensions you assume are perfectly delightful and amusing in a jester," said the Princess kindly. "It is such an original absurdity for a jester to put a crown on and pretend he's important!"

"I wonder if I ever shall come in a room to hear you talking sense?" said the Queen, as she opened the door and came up to the hearthrug.

"Hoo! I've 'ad a crown, and it won't fit; and now they won't give me my money back, so I've lost my money and the crown's no blooming use!" said the Jester, talking like a little street boy.

The Queen touched the Jester's cheek with her finger.

"How many plays have you read?" said she.

"It has been the most aggravating, disappointing morning I have ever spent," said the Jester. "I have only been able to read twenty-seven. Kindly chop off the Princess's head! In once, if you please, mum, or I resign!"

"The Princess is going to stay to lunch," said the Queen, kissing the Princess sweetly.

"I have no train to catch to-day," said the Princess, hesitating.

"You mean, to miss," said the Jester, opening a champagne bottle.

"But my Aunt expects me to lunch," said the Princess.

"Oh, couldn't you possibly stay? The Poet is here!" said the Queen. The Princess wavered.

"We have never had that little dinner yet," said the Poet, who had come into the room just that minute. "Do stay, dear Princess!"

"I am going away to-morrow for months and months," said the Princess; "so I think I will treat myself just this once to disobeying my Aunt," and the Princess sat down to the table. "Oh, do you remember that time when I met the Poet, here, and missed my train?" said the Princess, meeting the Poet's eyes with a reminiscent smile.

"Trains are ridiculous things to have in a kingdom," said the Poet.

"Railways are the finger-marks of fate," said the Jester, carelessly pouring champagne into the Princess's glass.

"I don't see any sense in that remark at all," said the Princess.

"There is none," said the Jester; "but I thought I said it with sufficient assurance for you not to notice that. Can I have some beer, O Queen?"

"You are having champagne," said the Queen.

"Champagne seems the most disgusting drink in the world at this moment," said the Jester.

"Oh, drink it now it's here," said the Queen.

"I really want some beer most frightfully," said the Jester.

The Queen went rather pink.

"You haven't touched any for days," said the Queen.

"Which is exactly the reason why I want it so frightfully now," said the Jester. "I could drink a whole barrellful. I am positively thirsting for beer!"

"As a matter of fact," said the Queen, and hesitated.

"I really must have some!" said the Jester, putting on his head-of-the-house air.

"It is ordered," said the Queen; "but, to tell you the truth, it won't be here till this evening."

"Really!" said the Jester. "I don't want to grumble or seem morbid, but it is extraordinary that if I ever have the smallest desire for anything, even a miserable little desire like that——"

"You are perfectly ridiculous!" said the Queen, and kissed him.

"Oh, dear!" said the Princess. "There are times when I wish I wasn't a Princess, but had just a little corner in your kingdom and belonged to you, like the Poet and the Jester."

"As you do," said the Queen, smiling beautifully.

"Royalty is kin all the world over," said the Poet quaintly. "You are our right well-beloved royal sister!"

"Oh, if I only were!" said the Princess. "You are so happy, together, and I do love you so much!"

"Ah, wait till we sit over our little fire and talk of the disgustingness of the world," said the Jester. "You will know then what companionship means!"

But as that time had not yet come, the Princess felt rather lonely.

VI.

THE PRINCE.

I HAVE been in love hundreds of times," said the Prince, "but I have never wanted to talk to anyone as much as I want to talk to you. Indeed, I have never been able to talk as I can talk to you."

"Why, that is how I feel," said the Princess, discreetly suppressing a memory of the Man in Uganda.

He was in Uganda, you see, and the Princess was in a punt, with the Prince kneeling on a cushion just behind her. The Prince was in this effeminate if princely position because he had to paddle the punt down-stream, and if he had stood up he could not have talked so comfortably to the Princess. As they had just expressed so much pleasure in mutual conversation, this would have been a pity. The Prince could not sit beside the Princess, because the Princess's enormous frilly hat, and her cushions and her sunshade and her own small self, took up all the end of the punt; so the Prince knelt humbly behind, and was rewarded with a beautiful view of snow-white sunshade and a brief glimpse occasionally of exactly a quarter of the Princess's face.

"Directly I saw you, I had the most extraordinary conviction that we should be friends. What did you

think when you first saw me?" said the Princess graciously.

"Nothing particular," said the Prince honestly. "I was thinking about the sunshade."

"Just imagine! If it hadn't tumbled into the river at that exact moment you would never have known me," said the Princess, with the innocence of utter shamelessness.

"To this day I can't see how you let it drop," said the Prince, with the innocence of inexperience.

"Most extraordinary, wasn't it?" said the Princess, who was wiser. "I wonder if people can ever really be honest with each other?" and a reflective tone came into the Princess's voice.

"We have promised to try," said the Prince.

"As we have promised," said the Princess, "I must tell you I did it on purpose."

"On purpose!" said the Prince, rather startled.

"I was tired of lying under the trees," said the Princess, "and I watched you coming down the stream; and I thought 'How exceedingly well that young man is punting'; and then I thought 'How exceedingly nice it would be if that young man would punt me about for a little'; and the sunshade fell into the water!" And the Princess lay back among her cushions with a satisfied air, as of one whose conscience was at last at ease.

"You had no idea what sort of person I might be," said the Prince.

"I was sure you were not a person, for your collar was right and you wore a Leander tie," said the Princess sweetly. "And the uprightness of your punting was enough to convince me of the uprightness of your morals!"

The Prince grinned. "It's very nice to be pals," he said.

"Let us go under that particularly nice shady tree," said the Princess. So the Prince paddled obediently into the bank.

There was a sweeping rushing sound as the branches gave way. Disgustingly wet and slimy willow twigs sprang out of the water and slapped the imprudent Princess in the face, as she well deserved; and then they were all by themselves in a beautiful little green cave with a roof of leaves, through which golden sunbeams came and danced on the Princess's hair. The hat and the sunshade both lay in the punt.

"This is quite ripping," said the Prince. He sat on his cushion and looked at the Princess, and the Princess rearranged her cushions so that she could see him.

"There are such lots of nice things about our palship," said the Princess. "It makes me quite nervous. It is so much too nice to last."

"I've often been pals with girls before," said the Prince. "I wonder why this is so different?"

"I am a princess, of course," said the Princess carelessly.

The Prince grinned all to himself. Then he put a faithful and admiring look into his expressive Irish eyes.

"And I am your faithful, clumsy slave, eh?" said the Prince, not meaning that he was clumsy at all.

"You cannot help being clumsy," said the Princess sweetly, "because you are so big. And the place of the Slave is taken. You must find another place in

my kingdom. What place would you like?" asked the Princess, with royal kindness.

"I'm not quite sure how much I may say to you," said the Prince. "You are a little frightening."

"Oh, why?" said the Princess, with an encouraging smile.

"You are frightfully sweet one minute," said the Prince, "and you make me want to flirt with you. Then if I do, you turn round and snub me."

"It's very horrid of you to want to flirt with me, when we have agreed to be pals," said the Princess.

"You are not the sort of girl one can only be pals with," said the Prince. "I don't believe you'd altogether like it if we were."

The Princess lightly changed the conversation.

"The nicest thing about our palship is that I know you all by myself," said the Princess. "You would not be half so interesting to me if I knew your people and you knew mine."

"No, indeed!" said the Prince. "It spoils everything when everyone knows, and chatters and gossips."

"You have an aunt too, then," thought the Princess sympathetically.

"I'm frightfully selfish with my pals," said the Prince. "I want to think I'm the only pal you have, someone you wouldn't discuss with anyone."

"Oh!" said the Princess, who was rather fond of discussing. "Not with *anyone*? Not even with the Queen?"

"What on earth do you want to talk about me for?" said the Prince, frowning.

"It may be only a habit," said the Princess meekly.

"It's a very silly one. I do wish you wouldn't," said the Prince, looking irritated.

"Even the Queen wouldn't quite understand about the peculiar circumstances that led to our acquaintance," said the Princess, "and I couldn't possibly talk about you to anyone else. My goodness! It's a mercy the Knight's been staying away these last three weeks! Though, of course, if he had been at home I could not have made friends with you; but then I should not have wanted to, as he can do all the attending on me that I require. Oh, he is such a dear! He's not quite so tall as you, though he's six feet, but he's much nicer looking. He's fair, you see, and I think fair men are so much more manly-looking, somehow; he looks a perfect picture in a punt. And he takes care of a person in the most beautiful way in the world."

"You are always talking about the Knight. I wish you would understand I am not in the least interested," said the Prince, in a voice people use when they wish to explain they are not jealous.

"You are not in the least interested in anyone but yourself," said the Princess. "I never met such an egotistic person in my life. It is all I, I, I."

"What about yourself?" said the Prince, with justice.

"Now we are quarrelling, which is absurd," said the Princess, "considering the especiality of our palship."

"You are rather a quaint little person," said the Prince.

"Don't call me 'little person,'" said the Princess, frowning. "That is the Slave's name for me, and I don't like you to use it."

"I certainly would not have dared, if I had known it was the Slave's prerogative," said the Prince, with biting satire and an exasperated voice. "Why will you keep bringing his name in? I tell you I'm not interested."

"Then it's very rude to say so," said the Princess; "and I think you're horrid. In the first place, I can't help talking about my friends, because I'm so fond of them; and in the second place, I want you to know all about me, because the more you know the more you will like me. Besides, remember how greatly I am interested in all your friends. The Mountebank, for instance."

"That was because you saw a play of his, though, at the Jester's," said the Prince.

"And because he is your friend, too," said the Princess sweetly. "Do tell me about him. What is he like?"

"Oh, I dunno. He's awfully cruel, and awfully brutal, and awfully clever, and awfully wicked, and awfully strong," said the Prince.

"Go on!" said the Princess, who was counting the "*awfullys*."

"He's quite different from anyone I've ever met, and I think he's a bit of a cad; at least you'd think so, as you're a girl," said the Prince. "But then you're different from everyone else, so you might like him."

"Awfully?" said the Princess.

"How can I tell?" said the Prince. "No, I shouldn't think, awfully."

"That's a pity," said the Princess; "because if it had been '*awfully*,' that would have made up half a dozen."

"You're always rotting," said the Prince.

"So sorry! Go on about the Mountebank," said the Princess. "I say, you know what I told you about the Jester and his play?"

"Well?" said the Prince.

"Well, do you think the Mountebank would misunderstand if I wrote to him and told him how the Jester liked it, to encourage him, you know?" said the Princess.

"Oh, I don't think I'd write," said the Prince, who was a bit of a dog in the manger concerning his friends.

"The fact is, I have," said the Princess. "Do you really think I shouldn't have done so?"

"What does it matter, now you've done it?" said the Prince, very irritated indeed. "And why did you ask my advice?"

"It was a test to see how conventional you were," said the Princess. "You didn't ever imagine I was asking your advice for guidance, did you?"

"Look here, we haven't settled what I may call you," said the Prince, who liked the Princess when she was cheeky, and who also preferred to talk about himself more than even his best friends.

"Couldn't you make up a name yourself?" said the Princess.

"If I called you what I wanted you would be angry," said the Prince.

"What should you call me?" said the Princess, with some slight curiosity.

"May I?" said the Prince.

"How can I tell unless I know what it is?" said the Princess rather impatiently.

"You promise you won't be offended?" said the Prince.

"Oh, my goodness! You may say it, whatever it is," said the Princess, thoroughly exasperated.

"Darling!" said the Prince, very shy indeed.

"As I have given permission, I will not be angry," said the Princess, not even pink; "but if you think it is at all a quaint or original title, I may tell you it is the name all the silliest youths I know employ when they are talking to me. Darling!" said the Princess contemptuously. "It is such a footling expression! It is the sort of expression a mild young clerk would use to a girl in an A.B.C. shop. Do you know what you must be to say darling?" said the Princess, shamelessly cribbing the Jester's little joke.

"A blithering ass," said the Prince.

"Oh!" said the Princess, rather annoyed. "I do hate people who answer riddles straight off."

The Prince carefully pulled the tassel of his cushion into separate pieces.

"It is silly to do that," said the Princess, "because my Aunt will ask what I have been doing to her cushion."

The Prince looked into the Princess's eyes, and laughed.

"I am still very offended," said the Princess, trying to look it.

"No, you're not," said the Prince, with sudden inspiration. "It's no use if you are, because I'm not going to be bullied. I am going to be Prince."

"You will be nothing of the kind," said the Princess, very pink indeed.

"I am going to be," said the Prince firmly. "I

shan't ask to be in your kingdom. I shall simply come in and take it by storm."

"I think you're hateful," said the Princess, looking inclined to cry. "It's mean to take advantage of a person when they have agreed to be friends."

"You've been flirting with me all the time," said the Prince, abating his firmness no whit, and looking most charmingly stern.

"Not consciously," said the Princess pleadingly. "I have *tried* to be pals."

"Then you've found that you can't be!" said the Prince in triumph.

"It is simply a question of environment," said the Princess, trying to be as clever as possible, to frighten off this bold marauding Prince. "If we were in a bright pink drawing-room, now, sitting on uneasy chairs with photographs of my relations all round me, and my Aunt and the Knight in the next room, wondering what we were saying, I should not be in the least littlest bit in love with you."

"Then you admit that you are at this moment?" said the disgustingly clever Prince.

"Oh, dear!" said the Princess. "I was simply arguing!"

"Don't let us argue," said the Prince, taking the Princess's hand. "I think you're just sweet!"

"Don't! That's what the Quiet——" The Princess suddenly stopped. "Men in books say," said the Princess, and she pulled her hand away.

"I didn't mean to be a cad," said the Prince, who was more foolish and weak, than *really* bad-hearted, "but, after all, I'm the Prince."

"We will discuss the question if you like," said the Princess, with sweet reasonableness.

"Hang discussion!" said the Prince.

"You have very nice eyes," thought the Princess. "They are so dark and twinkly. His are always so grave."

"I'm not going to be frightened of you," said the Prince.

"But your nose is not nearly so nice," thought the Princess.

"I am simply going to bully you," said the Prince.

"Your mouth is only rather firm," thought the Princess. "It is not a bad mouth, as far as I can see, but it doesn't look set and determined like his. After all, clean-shaven men are much the nicest."

"And if you dare to rebel, or snub me, I shall kiss you," said the Prince.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. What was that?" said the Princess, waking up to find the Prince had finished talking.

"You heard perfectly well," said the Prince, rather red.

"I'm quite sure I didn't," said the Princess, with honesty. "I was thinking of a man in Uganda."

"Hang the man in Uganda!" said the Prince.

"He is the most nicest man I know," said the Princess furiously; "and you aren't fit to black his boots!"

"If you're saying this to annoy me, you are taking a lot of trouble for nothing," said the polite and thoughtful Prince. "Because I simply do not care how many men you know in Timbuctoo."

"He is not in Timbuctoo!" said the Princess, most frightfully insulted. Then the Princess blinked her eyes; she was almost crying with annoyance.

"I never saw anyone so 'girl' in all my life," said the Prince. "I think I shall call you Girl."

"Oh, what a sweet little name!" said the Princess, awfully pleased. "Oh, I like you *so much*!"

"Oh, girl, you are 'Girl,'" said the Prince.

"You can say it as much as you like," said the Princess, with a happy little smile, "because I think it is a perfectly charming name."

The Prince took hold of the Princess's hand.

"What are you looking at?" said the Prince.

"I was only wondering. I beg your pardon," said the Princess in enormous confusion.

"You were looking at my moustache," said the Prince sensitively. It was a very young moustache.

"It is the polite place to look at when you look at a person's face," said the Princess, pinker and pinker.

"What were you wondering?" said the Prince, with a frown.

"Nothing like that—honour!" said the Princess, dreadfully afraid that she had hurt his feelings. "Honestly, I was simply thinking of 'The Gadsbys'!"

"'The Gadsbys'!" said the Prince, amazed.

The Princess suddenly blushed a beautiful crimson.

"It was such a silly-billy little thought, I have really forgotten it," said the Princess.

"'The Gadsbys'!" said the Prince, racking his brains. "I've read 'The Gadsbys.'"

"It is a silly book," said the Princess, reaching for her sunshade. "Do you like Kipling?"

"'The Gadsbys'!" said the Prince again. "Oh!"

The Princess carelessly put up her sunshade.

"You mean about the egg?" said the Prince.

"I mean nothing of the kind," said the Princess from behind her sunshade. "I forget what we were talking of."

"There is somebody in 'The Gadsbys' who says kissing a man without a moustache is like eating an egg without salt," said the Prince deliberately.

"I don't remember the passage," said the Princess.

"There's no sun at all here," said the Prince; "so if you put up your sunshade, it must be to hide."

"I thought I felt a draught," said the Princess.

"If there is any draught," said the Prince, "I am sitting right behind you, and I should shield you. You are afraid!"

"Afraid!" said the Princess, and shut up her sunshade. "Good heavens! Of what?"

"Of this!" said the Prince.

"It's not the least like," said the Princess, thoroughly disappointed. "I mean, how dare you?"

"You did," said the Prince.

"I?" said the Princess. "I dared you!"

"Your eyes did!" said the Prince. "So I did!"

"Oh!" said the Princess, so angry that she could not even argue.

"You are doing it again," said the Prince.

"I'm not!" said the Princess, shutting her eyes at once.

"Now you've thrown down your arms and are at my mercy," said the Prince, rather afraid all the same.

"If you dare to touch me!" said the Princess, and the tears came into her eyes. "You are a perfect cad!"

"Oh, I say, I'm so horribly sorry!" said the Prince.

"Please let us go home," said the Princess.

A fearfully ashamed Prince took the paddle and pushed out into the stream. Then he stood up to punt. The Princess pinned on her hat tearfully, and put up her sunshade. Being now equipped, she felt a little better.

"You have behaved like such a cad, I think it has cured me of ever wanting to speak to a strange man again," said the Princess.

"Well, you *do* back out," said the Prince.

"I do nothing of the kind," said the Princess. "At least, certainly I do, if I so wish. I'm *free* to do as I wish, I suppose? And when a man behaves like a pitiful cad, I certainly retire from his acquaintanceship. Perhaps you think it brave to take advantage of a person's helplessness and weakness?"

"Oh, I like that! You asked for it, after all," said the Prince, buckling on a furtive spur.

"Oh!" said the Princess.

"We agreed to be honest," said the Prince, loftily picking up his buckler.

"You knew you were a cad because you looked so frightfully ashamed," said the Princess, mounting her steed with all the pleasure in the world.

"I thought you minded," said the Prince, tilting full at the Princess's shield.

"Oh," said the Princess, sitting her horse tight, but rather out of breath for a minute. "Oh," said the Princess, completely recovered, "so did I."

"Did!" said the Prince, thinking his ears had made a mistake.

"Yes," said the Princess, with dashing effrontery.

"To tell you the truth, after my first shock of disappointment in Kipling, who I thought knew everything——"

"My hat!" said the Prince, staring at the Princess.

"I felt absolutely nothing whatever," said the Princess, cantering gaily off on a dancing steed.

"My hat!" said the Prince from the dust. Then he sat up and opened his eyes. "Why," said he, "you were crying."

"I was so frightfully disappointed," said the Princess, bringing back her steed for a last and dastardly charge on the Prince in the dust. "I was not only disappointed in that particular experience, which I had always understood was at least exciting, but I had hoped I was falling in love. I am so tremendously interested in falling in love," explained the Princess engagingly. "It's quite a hobby of mine in the summer. And though you are not very nice-looking, or clever, or even good-tempered, you punt so exceedingly well, I thought it might do for the summer, as the Knight's away. But I have no feeling at all to you—not even anger!" and the Princess caracoled joyously over and over the flattened-out Prince.

"You are simply horrid to me," said the Prince. "I can't answer back, or you'd call me a cad again. You don't play fair!"

"We agreed to be honest," said the Princess, beginning to dismount all the same.

"Now you won't be pals even!" said the Prince. "I wish you knew how frightfully I want——" The Prince nearly tumbled over his punt-pole.

"Everyone catches crabs," said the Princess kindly. "I am sure we shall be much better pals

now we have finished with the flirting part. 'As we have agreed to be honest, I may tell you I begin all my really great friendships with flirting.'

"Friendship be hanged!" said the Prince. "You have quite enough friends without me."

"I can never have enough," said the Princess. "I am so peculiarly gifted that, however many friends I have, I can love them all just as much, and each in an entirely different way. I love with my brains, you see, as well as my heart."

"I want you to love me only with your heart," said the Prince, gazing sentimentally at a beautiful white sunshade.

"Then you're foolish," said the Princess promptly. "That's the sort of love silly women and animals feel. It is narrow and selfish, and shows you have only hens' brains. Now, I love millions of people, and I know my reason for loving each one of them."

"It's rot to love people for reasons," said the Prince. "If you love one man because he's unselfish, and another because of his nose——"

"It wasn't only for that," said the Princess indignantly. Then she suddenly blushed.

"Now, who's the chap you're thinking of?" said the Prince, thoroughly enraged.

"It's the one I'm nearly always thinking of," said the Princess defiantly.

"Confound!" said the Prince, nearly falling over his punt-pole.

"You're not punting a bit well to-day," said the Princess. "And as that happens to be the particular thing I like you for——"

"Oh, please don't like me for my virtues!" said a cross and angry Prince.

"As it happens, I like you for your faults," said the Princess thoughtfully. "They are much more interesting and striking than your virtues. Now, some people's virtues are more interesting than their faults," said the Princess, thinking of the man in Uganda. "I am not going to tell you which is the sort of person I like best, for that would be giving myself away."

And the Princess gazed discreetly at the river, and complimented herself on the fact that she had been quite honest. And such is the duplicity of princesses, and the vanity of princes, that a most beautiful smile overspread the face of the Prince.

"You can be frightfully nice when you like," said the Prince.

"I am not in the least certain that I am not falling a little in love with you, after all," said the Princess, very kind and condescending now the Prince was duly humbled and reduced. "I consider we have both emerged from this little *contretemps* very successfully. At one time we both came near to looking ridiculous, but you have come through all right. You were ashamed just enough, and I had rather you erred on the side of being too awkward than being too assured."

"Do you discuss everything like this?" said the Prince.

"I am of a very thoughtful turn of mind," said the Princess, with a dimple.

"Shall I tell you something to think about?" said the Prince.

"I am always pleased to have food for reflection," said the wise and serious Princess.

"Well, then," said the Prince, "I was rather in love with you before I——"

"I know," said the Princess hastily.

"Then directly after I did not love you at all."

"Oh, dear!" said the Princess.

"But now I love you three times as much," said the Prince. "In fact, I believe I am going to be really in love at last, if I am not already."

"Oh, I am so glad!" said the Princess.

The Princess looked as if he had done a kind act.

"Because," said the Princess, "I think I see my Aunt on the landing-stage, and I am sure she would not approve of a trifling flirtation."

"You must introduce me to your Aunt," said the Prince.

The Princess glanced at the Prince, to see if this were merely a foolish joke or true princely valour. But the Prince's eyes were quite unconcerned, and the Princess burst into laughter.

"You're not joking?" she said. "Oh, how awfully funny!"

"Why?" said the Prince, who prided himself on the fact that he could win any old lady's heart in five minutes.

"My Aunt has not the faintest idea that I know you," said the wicked deceiving Princess. "She thinks I come down to the river to lie under the trees and study, because the mowing machine distracts me in the garden."

"Well, she knows you know me now," said the Prince. "She's staring as hard as she can."

"Then do punt nicely," said the Princess, and of course the Prince fell over his punt-pole.

"It cannot be helped," said the Princess resignedly; "but my only excuse is gone."

Then the Prince made a nervous entry to the landing-stage of the boat-house, where a grinning boatman assisted the Princess to land.

"Who is this young man?" said the Aunt.

"I had the pleasure of picking your niece's sunshade out of the water," said the Prince.

"As we have agreed to be quite honest," said the Princess, with a touch of regret, "I am afraid I must tell you that was three weeks ago."

"Will you please get into the Stanhope?" said the Aunt.

"Good-bye!" said the Princess to the Prince. "I said our palship was too nice to last. As I am afraid we shall not meet again for some time——"

"Will you please get into the Stanhope?" said the Aunt, who, like most women of one idea, was inclined to repeat herself.

"I will write to you at the post office at Cookham, and tell you where you can send letters in safety," said the Princess. "I am so sorry if I have kept you, Aunt. I had no idea you were waiting."

Then the distinctly sympathetic boatman helped the Princess into the Stanhope, and received a friendly and understanding smile from the democratic Princess.

"Gray will drive," said the Aunt, so the Princess had to take a back seat.

"Now will you please explain your conduct?" said the Aunt.

The Prince was punting rapidly down-stream. The Princess turned her eyes abstractedly from the

river, and appeared to recall her Aunt's presence with a start.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Aunt," said the Princess, "if I am a little absent! I think I have fallen in love."

"In love!" gasped the Aunt.

"But I cannot yet tell you for certain," said the Princess, with a touch of reproof. "You are too quick, Aunt. One cannot rush a thing like that."

"Do you know anything about this young man?" said the Aunt.

"Not a thing," said the Princess. "If I did, I am sure I should not be in love."

"Don't you think you could find something more profitable to occupy your mind with than love-making?" said the Aunt.

"Nothing so pleasant. You know, Aunt, different things interest different people," said the Princess, delighted to discuss the subject from a new and entertaining standpoint. "Some people are interested in woman's suffrage; I am interested in falling in love. Every man to his trade."

"You are perfectly disgraceful!" said the Aunt. "I'm afraid it is all the influence of that Poet."

"He has had so little on me it is scarcely worth mentioning," said the Princess regretfully.

"I don't approve of the influence of any of that set," said the Aunt. "It is a thoroughly immoral one!"

"If it be immoral to be happy, and love everyone in the nicest way possible, also to see the ridiculous side of things," said the Princess, "then I hope I shall grow more and more immoral every day."

"Would you kindly not be flippant," said the Aunt. "It does not impress me at all."

"Humour," said the Princess, "is the salt which keeps the yeast of our brains wholesome!"

"I call that sort of remark rude, not clever," said the Aunt.

"Oh well, I think it is very clever," said the Princess, extremely injured, but loyally believing in her unappreciated little *bon mot*.

"I am not going to argue with you," said the Aunt, which disappointed the Princess exceedingly. "You will go straight off to Cornwall to-morrow, and I only regret I cannot go with you."

"The regret, I am sure, is mine," said the Princess, with that touch of old-fashioned politeness which it is so pleasant to see in the young.

Then the Aunt and the Princess drove home in thoughtful silence.

VII.

THE ARTIST.

"GOOD-MORNING!" said the Princess.
The Artist sat on the low stone wall and scraped his palette. Below in the valley the houses lay huddled together. A little stream trickled up between the houses, and turned a mill-wheel far far below the Princess's window, and the hills rose up opposite as well as behind the Artist's cottage, and made a funnel running inland from the sea. The whole Atlantic dashed against the rocks at the end of the valley, and was only stopped by the harbour breakwater from sweeping right up inside the funnel; and the sea breeze came sharply against the Princess's face and made her gasp for breath, it was so sharp and buoyant.

The sun had risen hours ago, but the lazy Princess had only just tumbled out of bed and slipped herself into a mass of blue frills and distracting ribbons, so that she might look out of the window and talk to the Artist.

"Hullo!" said the Artist, and looked up with his fatherly smile.

The Princess thought the great old masters must have been like the Artist in their youth: his work had all their sober reverence and dignity, and he had none of the tricks of modern painters. He himself was as simple and dignified as his work, and though

he was not much more than a boy—at least, a quite young man—he had none of the foolishness of youth. Wherefore he was a good friend indeed for the Princess. The Artist had married the Princess's dearest chum, and she was as beautiful as he was wise. She was the most beautiful of all wives, the Housewife. Her face was as serene and sunny as a field of corn. She had deep blue-grey eyes, with a great store of humour in them, and yet they were as steady and honest as the most serious person's; and around her there was always a cosy comfortable atmosphere of home. When you saw the Housewife, you thought instinctively of blazing fires, and shining rows of pewter, and sanded floors, and well-stocked larders, and piles of snowy linen, lavender-scented, in great cupboards; and all the troubles of neurotic imaginations and analytical young minds became at once mere unsubstantial figments of a diseased brain.

Yet the Housewife was only a Girl Housewife, and as sympathetic for real troubles as anyone could wish; but she was also the most sensible person in the world, and the Princess often wondered how it was she and the Housewife were such real good friends. "It shows that I can't be as silly as people think," thought the conceited Princess, and it never occurred to her that sensible people often are fond of silly ones.

As for the Artist, the Princess worshipped him so devoutly and so reverently, he would not have been human if he had not liked her. Though as to that, the Artist always saw the best side of everyone, for he was even wiser than the Queen.

Fortunately, the Artist and the Housewife were among the very few of the Princess's friends of whom

the Aunt approved, and the Princess was allowed to stay with them even when she was in disgrace. Besides, Cornwall is a long way away from Cookham, and so the Aunt had packed the Princess off with some degree of confidence that distance might effect a cure. Yet the Princess was never more pleased with herself, and consequently more reckless, than when she was with people who loved and understood her as the Artist and the Housewife did.

"Had breakfast?" said the Princess airily.

"Hours ago," said the Artist.

"Seen the Little Lieutenant?" said the Princess.

"Not yet," said the Artist.

Now, whenever the Princess came to a new place, every inhabitant, male or female, was of surpassing interest to her, which interest was shared and fostered by the Housewife. The Little Lieutenant was staying at the inn, and was a source of the greatest excitement to both the Princess and the Housewife; he was such a very smart and dashing little boy, that there seemed no reason whatever to account for his spending his leave all alone in a quiet little Cornish fishing hamlet. He had no friends apparently in Polcombe; nor had he definite pursuits, but seemed to spend the greater part of the day lounging along the cliffs, or going for lonely drives in the ramshackle inn dog-cart. He avoided the tribe of artist ladies who descended on the village now and then with their sketch-books and their canvases; and during the three days the Princess had spent in Polcombe his name had been on her lips at least a hundred and ninety-seven times.

"Post come?" said the Princess.

"I can see the postman going round the village

now," said the Artist. The Princess craned her head out of the window and tried to imagine she saw the postman, while the wind blew the Princess's hair all over her face.

"I like you with your hair down," said the Artist.

"I like myself with it down," said the unblushing Princess. "That was partly the reason why I looked out of the window. Oh, dear, I do wish the post would come!"

"I wish you'd come down to breakfast," said the Housewife, coming out into the little garden.

"May I come down like this?" said the shockingly Bohemian Princess.

"You can if you like, but you'll have to dress after," said the Housewife, who always wore the freshest and neatest of frocks and white collars in the morning.

"Such a nuisance, dressing!" said the Princess, blinking sleepy eyes.

"Oh, dress now," said the Housewife, who hated dressing-gowns, even frilly ones.

So the Princess suppressed recollections of the charming *negliges* in which the Queen's artistic soul delighted, and gave herself up to the weariness of bathing and dressing and brushing her hair. Then she went down to breakfast in a new blue muslin frock, and felt truly clean and virtuous. The Princess's breakfast was not a very lengthy operation, and she soon sauntered into the little garden, filled with old-fashioned roses and hardy gilliflowers and stocks, and sat down on the low wall by the Artist, while he scraped his canvases.

"I don't believe that postman's coming," said the Princess, morbidly.

"Who's the letter from?" said the Artist.

"I don't know when the foreign mails will get to this silly little post office," said the Princess. "I mean, there's no letter in particular. I mean, there are such lots——" And the Princess blushed a comprehensive blush.

"Poor slaves!" said the Artist, going on with his scraping, with the hint of a smile.

"It's rather confusing and worrying," said the Princess, with more than the hint of a sigh. "I sometimes wonder if I *am* truly polygamic by nature."

"My—dear! ! ! " said the Artist, putting down his knife.

"Or whether I am really monogamic, like you and Lisbeth," said the Princess, nursing her knees and looking dreamily over the sea. "When I'm staying with you, I can't help feeling it's much more satisfying to love one person only, and your home, and your work, and be just quietly comfortably happy. I'm sure I should have been quite happy if I'd married you."

"Nonsense!" said the Artist, who was not embarrassed, because he was used to the Princess's personal way of talking.

"He would have to be rather stronger than you, perhaps," said the Princess, still gazing at the distant horizon; "and not so kind, because I should need to be bullied, or else I should do silly things and he'd be ashamed of me. You would never have bullied me, would you?" said the Princess thoughtfully.

"I don't bully Lisbeth," said the Artist, with a smile.

"Of course not," said the Princess rather haughtily. "Lisbeth is not silly. She bullies you, if anything. As she should do!"

"And I humbly submit," said the Artist, with a twinkle, for he enjoyed the patronising airs that Lisbeth and the Princess assumed to him when they were together.

"No, you don't submit; you just understand each other. But then you're both so sensible," said the Princess absently, and gazing far far away, almost to Uganda. "I should like to be ruled."

"For how long?" said the Artist.

"For as long as he could keep it up, of course," said the Princess. "Thank Heaven, here's the postman. Oh, postman, dear, how many letters?"

The Queen was fond of saying that the Princess would embrace a road-scraper, and the Princess nearly kissed the postman when he handed up six letters. She certainly called him "a perfect dear," and thanked him with a scream of rapture as she seized her spoils. Then the postman went on his way, still grinning, and an ecstatically happy Princess tore open a thin blue letter that had come all the way from Uganda.

"He's a lucky man if he is in Uganda," said the Artist, as the envelope with its tell-tale postmark fluttered to his feet.

"Don't talk!" said the Princess breathlessly, and the Artist scraped his canvases in obedient silence.

The Princess was a long time before she looked up from her letter, though it was a very short one. When she did, she met the amused eyes of the Artist.

"It wasn't a very long one," said the Artist teasingly.

"I hate men who write long letters," said the Princess defiantly. "They are always conceited egotists."

"Oh, come!" said the Artist.

"Well—they think their thoughts worth writing down," said the Princess, with fine contempt, as she picked up a bulky envelope and weighed it meditatively. It did not need the Cookham postmark nor even the Prince's handwriting to tell the observant Princess whence it came.

"Would you like me to read it to you?" said the Princess, trying to guess how many sheets the Prince had wasted on her unappreciative self.

"Ought I to listen?" said the Artist.

"It's such an awful lot to read to myself," said the Princess, tearing open the letter and discovering fifteen sheets. "If it bores you, I'll stop. But I think you'll be interested in the Prince. I was at first."

Then the Princess kicked her heels against the wall, and languidly read out the Prince's letter.

"'First of all, the cheek, the frabjous cheek of the little fraud, to back out and slang me at the same time,' " read the Princess.

"He doesn't address me as anything," explained the Princess. "I don't know if that's cowardice or originality. He's never really called me by my Christian name, and of course 'Miss' — is absurd.

"'Let's have this out,' " read the Princess. "Seems to be annoyed about something, doesn't he? I believe I dropped him a line to say I was sick of the whole affair. My Aunt kicked up such a fuss, it made me quite dispirited, don't you know; but I

really forget what I did write, I came off in such a hurry."

"You found time to write, though," said the Artist.

"Oh, I always find time to write to anyone; that means nothing," said the Princess. "I scribble off a dozen pages before ordinary people would have composed the first sentence; but of course I don't remember what I've put. Now, please don't interrupt, or we shall lose the thread of this most interesting letter."

And the Princess found her place, and continued with great interest.

"'We sort of started in the punt, remember? You opened fire on a poor frightened stranger'—poor dear!" ejaculated the Princess, with contemptuous tenderness—"by swearing you weren't rotting, and tried to make me believe you didn't know how to flirt. I confess I didn't know you very well then——'"

"He didn't!" said the Artist.

"Now, why do you say that?" said the Princess, laying down the letter sharply. "I've never flirted with you."

The Artist was discreetly silent.

"I shouldn't waste the time," said the Princess. "You admire Lisbeth so much, you haven't eyes for anyone else."

"You flirt with everybody, man or woman," said the Artist.

"Oh, well—what is flirting?" said the Princess.

"Making yourself consciously attractive," said the Artist.

"I always am filled with a sense of my honest

worth," said the Princess charmingly; "and I pay everyone the compliment of caring enough for their affection to take the trouble to try to win it. Shall I go on with this letter, or does it bore you?"

"I am most interested," said the Artist.

"He does write sweet letters; not a bit stiff, are they? And so boyish and original. I think he's rather clever, you know," said the Princess, with maternal interest, and she read on again:

"'Snub me if you like, for my infernal conceit, but admit you tried to make me believe you were not flirting and really cared. You were rather hard on a——,'"

"Now it's about himself. It wouldn't be honourable to read you that," said the Princess, who had extraordinary ideas of honour. "I'll just skip till he talks of me again," and the Princess hastily skipped through seven pages.

"Now, this is very interesting," said the Princess. "And I also can't understand a bit what he means, so I shall have to read it out to ask your opinion. Oh, he has got tied up here. 'I am sorry for a man who loves the human you only, and who is impossible for you to think with,' " read the Princess again. "'But I should be more sorry for you if you ever loved the human man only of the man you thought in perfect sympathy with your ideals, when you found he didn't understand; he might not, you know. I mean, your sympathy-of-thoughts theory might be interrupted by love. How awful!' Now *isn't* that silly?" said the Princess. "I *want* to be in love in the ordinary beautiful way, as you and Lisbeth are. I don't know what he means by the sympathy-of-thoughts rot. I should have thought a man who's as

clever as the Prince would have known girls always talk like that, for conversation. Why, I'm taking all this trouble, and getting to know all these new people, and undergoing all these scoldings and general unpleasantnesses, simply because I am trying to fall simply and humanly in love; for I am sure I am monogamic in my heart. The only thing is, one must look about a little before one can make sure."

"The Prince seems to wish you hadn't looked at him," said the Artist, who pitied the Prince quite unnecessarily.

"I always told him I only loved him because he had nice eyes and punted well," said the Princess, who enjoyed being thought hard-hearted. "I never deceived himself or me into thinking he could make me happy as a monogamist."

"My child, you *must* not use such words!" said the Artist.

"Oh, bother!" said the Princess. "If I can't use scientific terms, how am I to explain clearly? The Prince is only amusing himself with me because he finds Cookham rather quiet, but if he met a prettier girl he would think himself in love with her. He's so weak and wobbly. He's always thinking himself in love."

"What about your royal self?" said the amused Artist.

"Oh, I'm a girl," said the Princess, and went on reading the letter. "'You must not say "no more flirting" before you give me my revenge. You know you've been hitting me when I'm down all the time. It wasn't a fair fight. Now I know, though, I have a powerful enemy, and I challenge you to mortal combat when we meet again.' He hasn't the ghost of a

chance with *me*," said the Princess, with great contempt.

"I don't believe you have a heart at all," said the Artist.

"Oh, yes, I have," said the Princess, "but it's at my own disposal. The Prince's isn't. He's the sort of man who's *fascinated* by women. He's so weak he can be helplessly fascinated by three or four at a time! I should not be so silly as to give my heart to anyone like that. Why, the Prince's life is like a game of musical chairs. He's always plopping down, and the next minute jumping up and running on and plopping down again, like a silly *child*!"

"Then, why do you take so much notice of him?" said the Artist.

"Oh, well, when the game brings him to my side I may as well enjoy the few minutes he's there," said the Princess commonsensibly. "He has sweet eyes and he flirts pretty well, though not so well as he thinks . . . and so . . . though I despise him for being so uncertain of his own mind . . ."

"I *do* like these comments from you!" said the Artist.

"Well, you don't expect men to be as silly and weak as women, do you!" said the Princess, with great scorn. "Well, you *are* a neurotic creature! Go and join the Pharos! or the Sesame! or Stage Society! · Ibsenite!"

The Princess's stock of insults being low for the moment, she turned to the letter and continued reading with a pleased smile.

"He is a ridiculous boy," said the Princess; "so ridiculous it would not be fair to go on reading the letter aloud. Just listen to this! 'Now I'm going

to bully you, and give you a chance of snubbing me, a lovely one. No! I won't say it! I won't ask it! Because, unless I looked at you while you were answering, I should never believe you, however you answered.' Hoo!" said the Princess, "I can deceive more by the way I look at people than by the words I use."

"You are much more honest than you have any idea of," said the Artist, who had known the Princess for more than ten years.

"You mean more stupid," said the Princess, with unruffled temper. She had come to such a nice part in the letter. "'Yes, you are the most adorable person in the world, and I am coming down to Cornwall; and I promise I will bowl you clean over if you dare to stand up against me. That's the resurrection of conceit. Now will you write and say you hate me, please?' No, certainly not!" said the Princess cheerfully, and folded up the many sheets in a neat bundle. "I like him extremely."

"Then I think it's most unfair to have read his letter out loud," said the Artist.

"Not at all," said the Princess. "I'm playing the game, that's all. He's amusing himself with me, and I'm amusing myself with him. He's written letters like that to hundreds of girls, I suppose; there's nothing particularly private in it. I'm not sure that he's in love with me at all. Is he, or isn't he? What do you think?"

"You ought to know best," said the Artist.

"I don't think the Prince knows," said the Princess thoughtfully. "He is in love when he thinks I don't care for him. Then I give myself away to him, in an affectionate mood, or a penitent mood, or just an ex-

cited mood, and he thinks he is most frightfully important to me; and naturally he's rather bored, and doesn't care so much then. Men cannot understand how frightfully interested I am in everyone," said the Princess, kicking her heels in a gay and reflective manner. "Now, what I want to know is, Is there any chance of my falling in love with the Prince?"

"Most certainly not!" said the Artist. "You never will be in love with anyone."

"No?" said the Princess, and smiled innocently.

"You wouldn't talk about it if you were," said the Artist.

"Perhaps you're right," said the Princess, and she smiled a little more. The letter from the Quiet Man was tucked away close to her heart. "But the joke of it is, the Prince feels genuine remorse lest he should have made me really care for him, as he hasn't quite made up his mind yet. As if anyone could possibly care for a man who falls down like a slave when any woman wiggles her finger. I'm not a fool," said the Princess.

"Then why do you write to him?" said the Artist.

"For interest," said the Princess audaciously. "Now, what do the other silly-billy letters say?" And the Princess opened the third letter.

"From the Knight!" said the Princess, with a slight contraction of her brow. "My hat!" The Princess sat up furiously. "He says my Aunt has told him what a fool I've made of myself with the Prince, and he's coming down here to look after me, as I'm not to be trusted alone."

"Good biz!" said the Artist, who was great friends with the Knight.

"I call it dashed cheek!" said the Princess, and she tore up the letter. "Very pleasant it will be for me and the Prince if the Knight is here!"

"I shall be extremely glad to have someone to share my responsibility," said the Artist. "I'm trembling to think what will come of the Little Lieutenant alone."

"He is a nice-looking boy," said the Princess, with the air of one who must be just. "I rather wish that I knew him."

"I'm perfectly aware of the fact," said the Artist. "And if he passes this house many more times——"

"How could I get to know him?" asked the Princess, in an aggrieved but tentative manner.

"There are lots of ways," said the Artist.

"Tell me one," said the Princess, who wished for the information.

"I should not presume to teach you," said the Artist. "How did you get to know the Prince?"

"The Prince rescued me from danger," said the Princess, with dignity. "And my relations ought to be grateful to him, instead of making themselves so unpleasant. I bet you the Knight won't *speak* to him."

"You don't seriously think the Prince is coming here?" said the Artist.

"Why not?" said the Princess defiantly. "If the Prince wants to come to Polcombe, I call it dashed cheek to object."

"I call it dashed cheek if he comes," said the Artist.

"Now, what are you two quarrelling about," said the Housewife, coming into the porch.

"Nothing, dear! I'm just looking through my letters," said the Princess sweetly. "Here's one from

the Queen." And the Princess took up a pale blue envelope which bore the Rye Mill watermark, and smelt of violets, and was covered in the prettiest of handwriting.

"Isn't it a pretty letter?" said the Princess, looking at it affectionately. "Even before you open it, you know it will be nice."

Then the Princess broke the Queen's royal seal, and smiled ecstatically as she read the opening lines.

"I must read it out loud," said the Princess, "as a pattern of how to write letters. The Queen is at Furzewaite, where the Jester has just started his tour. It's a place in Yorkshire, a smoky, dirty place.

"'You dear spoilt baby: Here we are at Furzewaite. It's raining and quite cold, and actually we have ordered a fire. We arrived here about three o'clock, and I went straight upstairs and had a little sleep. Now I am down, arrayed in my djibbah, have had my cup of tea and cigarette, and am now about to write to the cleverest and most charming Princess in fairyland.'"

The Princess tried to suppress a smile.

"Oh, I understand why you are reading it," said the Housewife, making no attempt to suppress hers.

"Lisbeth, you are presuming!" said the Princess, with dignity, and she held up her chin very high and continued:

"'I wish you could see this room. The landlady is what we call in the north "house-proud," and everything is in perfect order and spotlessly clean. She is a collector, and evidently a bit of a connoizer, as the Jester says, for the walls are covered with pictures, and every available space has its piece of china more or less hideous. On the back of each of the

chairs, which are covered with stamped velvet, is sewn a small square of lace, about the size of a doyley for a plate; and every other article of furniture is decorated in some way with arrangements of lace. I have come to the conclusion, after carefully looking round, that the coalbox is the only absolutely naked thing in the room. And yet, in spite of everything, you don't know what a cosey effect the whole room has. There is the lazy little Jester lying back in the arm-chair with his feet as near to the fire as he can get them, trying to make up his mind to rise up and read plays and write letters. And now I have a little scolding——' ”

The Princess stopped short. “ Now it is all private,” said the Princess.

The Artist and the Housewife preserved an amused but respectful silence while the Princess concluded the letter; then the Princess folded it up and surveyed it affectionately.

“ I read it to you,” said the Princess, “ because if either of you had been writing to me from Furze-waite, you would have simply said ‘ This is a filthy, uninteresting hole, and there's no news at all.’ But the Queen waves her pen, and I am at once with her and the darling Jester. It is a most extraordinary thing, but when the Queen writes to me I feel so good and so wise; it seems impossible I could ever be angry or foolish again. She has a wonderful influence, so soothing and powerful,” said the foolish Princess, as she tore open a large long envelope addressed in angular characters.

“ From my Aunt,” said the Princess, with darkening brows. “ Oh! It's her doing the Knight's coming, is it? I thought as much.”

The Princess read two more sentences, then uttered a fierce and profane exclamation, and suddenly rent the paper into fragments and scattered it savagely over the inoffensive valley below.

"It is the most extraordinary thing," said the Princess, who lived in a state of perennial wonder, "but my Aunt has the cleverest knack of enraging me of anyone I know!"

"You haven't read it," said the Artist.

"There might have been something important in it," said the Housewife, looking rather impatient at the Princess's impulsive ways.

"I must risk that," said the Princess. "Two sentences make me so raging that, if I read on, I should have to send her a poisoned flower by return of post. Besides, if there *were* anything important, it would be unpleasant news; of that I can be perfectly sure. It is really very strange that people who try to make me good should have such an opposite effect on me. At the present moment I would give all I own if my Aunt could see me running amuck in church, with an open jack-knife in my hand, spearing choir boys. I am sorry to feel so fearfully wicked, but it is not my fault. Whatever I do after a letter from my Aunt, the consequences are on my Aunt's head!"

And the Princess opened the sixth letter.

"Great Scott!" said the Princess, and forgot all about Queen and Aunt together. "It's from the Silly Poet—I mean the Mountebank! Now, isn't that exciting?"

"Who's he?" said the Housewife, with a good-natured laugh. "Someone new, of course."

"Yes," said the Princess. "He sent a play to the Jester, and I wrote to him to tell him how much the

Jester liked it. I've never seen him. Oh, what a dear little note!" said the Princess, laughing and blushing together. "He's staying at Udy, and he says, Can he see me? Isn't that lucky? Udy's only ten miles away. Just think!"

"Why didn't the Jester write to the Mountebank himself?" said the Artist.

"He was so busy," said the slightly untruthful Princess. "I thought I'd save him the trouble. I shall drive over to Udy to-day."

"Think it wise?" said the Artist.

"Poor Silly Poet," said the Princess. "Of course it's wise. I want to help him, if it's only with my sympathy."

"Why not ask him over here?" said the Artist.

"He might be frightened of you," said the Princess. "Silly Poets are so shy and sensitive."

"But he's a Mountebank," said the Artist. "Surely Mountebanks are bold enough."

"I'll ask him to come over if he's nice," said the Princess; "but I want to see him first by myself. It's all right, isn't it, Lisbeth?"

"Oh, let her do as she likes," said the Housewife to the Artist, in her amused, good-natured voice.

"Lisbeth understands," said the Princess, and slipped her hand into the Housewife's arm affectionately. "Girl pals are much nicer than men," thought the Princess. "Men lose their heads over such trifles."

"The Princess can take care of herself," said the Housewife, and the Princess preened herself complacently. "Besides, she'll go, whatever we say."

"You see!" said the Princess, and the Artist went off to his work, squashed flat as mere man should be.

"He'd better order the cart as he goes past the corner," said the Housewife; so the Princess called out her royal orders to the Artist, and then sat down by the Housewife in the porch and helped her to shell peas.

The Housewife shelled and the Princess ate, till the Housewife thought the Princess had better get ready.

"Put on your white frilly hat," said the Housewife; "I like you in that."

"All right, chicken!" said the Princess, in the bluff and manly voice she liked to use to girl chums; and then she went up to her room, and tried on all her hats till the Housewife called up to her to say the cart had come. Then the Princess hurriedly tried them all over again, and pinned on the white frilly hat after all, just as the Housewife was starting to come upstairs to say the boy would not wait any longer.

"Now, don't be too gushing," said the Housewife, escorting the Princess down the walk; "and don't fall in love. You've quite enough on hand."

"Don't be so silly," said the Princess, and she smiled engagingly at the ragged little boy who drove the cart, and offered him an extremely choice cigarette from her cigarette case—of which the cigarettes were a tribute from the Slave, and the case a dainty token from the Queen.

Then they rattled away over the cobblestones down the hill into the village of Polcombe, through which they had to pass to go to Udy.

The Princess peeped into the inn windows as they rattled by, and was rewarded by a sight of the lonely Little Lieutenant yawning over his solitary breakfast. Being a curious Princess, she wondered if the Lieu-

tenant had seen her pass; and being an imprudent Princess, she turned round to see if he were looking after her; and being a compassionate Princess, she bestowed a smile upon the Lieutenant in his loneliness when she saw him half-way through the window. But the Lieutenant suddenly displayed unexpected bold and dashing qualities, and not only smiled back at the Princess, but had the audacity to kiss his hand repeatedly.

"Oh!!!" said the really shocked Princess, and turned her back upon the bold Lieutenant, and did not feel any more pleased or dignified when she encountered the sympathetic grin of the ragged little driver. Then the Princess preserved an air of dignified propriety all the long and lonely way to Udy.

VIII.

THE MOUNTEBANK.

“**L**ET us drive a little way along the front,” said the Princess, as they came into the straggling town of Udy; so they drove by the side of the harbour till the rocks fell away on either side of the bay stretched behind them, and they came full on the open sea.

Oh, how the wind and sea-spray swept against the Princess’s face. Her hat flew up in the air, and her hair blew into her eyes and out again; and all this excitement completely revived her. After all, it did not matter if a bold Lieutenant were cheeky; it was only what could be expected. But a Poet would surely be understanding and respectful, especially a Silly Poet, who had written such a quaint and fanciful play.

“He is a Mountebank as well,” said the voice of Prudence, that always whispered to the Princess when she was embarking on a foolish adventure. But the little black devils that lived in the Princess’s heart stirred and grew lively in the bracing sea-breeze; and they sprang up and peeped out of the Princess’s eyes, and shouted so loudly that the voice of Prudence sounded very weak and small indeed.

“You’re dying to see what he’s like,” said the dear little devil called Love-of-Excitement. “And

Mountebanks are supposed to be a very wicked class, and you've never known a truly wicked person in your life. Here's a new experience."

"The Jester likes heaps of Mountebanks, but he warned you against this one," said the sharp clear voice of Common-sense.

"But you're so interested in his play, and so sorry for his failure," said a soft and silky little devil with an angel face, whose real name was Love-of-Emotion, but whom the Princess liked to refer to by its stage name of Sympathy.

Then the two little devils called Love-of-Excitement and Love-of-Emotion grinned and pranked about and made themselves more and more alluring, till Common-sense and Prudence looked very plain and dull beside the charming devils.

"Now go to the town and call at the hotel," said the naughty devils. "Show us how brave you are. You're not going to funk it, are you?"

So a pink-cheeked and excited Princess told the ragged little driver to turn his pony round.

"Just *think* what the Queen would say if she saw you going to call on a Mountebank!" said Common-sense and Prudence together, shouting so loudly they almost drowned the voices of the devils.

"What would your Aunt say?" said the devils, who knew the evil of a sense of humour.

"Oh, if she could *only* see me!" thought the Princess, and chuckled with the devils. "Why, she has literally sent me here to Cornwall, right into this sin!"

"Oh, think of the dear Queen," said the little faithful voices, trying, oh, so hard! to shout above the devil din.

"If I always did as the Queen wished, I should be nothing but a slave," said the Princess.

And the devils clapped their hands, and said how brave and spirited she was in stage whispers to each other.

"I'm going to keep my independence and have fun!" said the Princess.

"Hurrah!" said the devils; and the Princess drove up to the hotel and dismounted with a dash, and marched into the hall and asked for the Mountebank as bold as brass.

But the Mountebank was out, and the Boots looked at the Princess in a most disrespectful manner.

"Out!" said the Princess, and tried to look as if it were a matter of no importance whatever. "Oh, well, I suppose I'd better have lunch here, anyway. Show me to a private room."

"There's someone in Mr. Viviani's sitting-room," said the Boots, not in the least in the tone that one should use to royalty.

"What has that to do with me?" said the Princess, with a crimson flush but a majestic stare.

"Thought you'd better have it in the coffee-room, perhaps," said the Boots, in a tone that was meant to be a little defiant, but that came out apologetically under the cold and imperious stare of the Princess's eyes.

"If you have not a private room where I may take my lunch alone, I will go somewhere else," said the Princess.

"Beg pardon, miss," said the Boots, very much abashed, as the Princess swept past him with her chin tip-tilted in the air and her silver cigarette case and her chain purse in her hand; and truly thankful the

Princess felt that she had filled her purse before she started.

"Is this the manager?" said the Princess to a Suspicious Observer.

The Observer bowed, and said it was.

"Then will you kindly show me to a private room where I can lunch? And if Mr. Viviani comes in, will you tell him I shall be quite charmed if he will lunch with me? I want a room where I can smoke," said the perfectly insane Princess.

The Obsequious Observer almost scraped the ground as he led the Princess into a dingy little room and took down a dingy label which said "No smoking!"

Then the Princess ordered lunch, and commanded that the needs of the ragged little driver should be seen to; and then she was left to her meditations for a space.

"Go home!" said the faithful voices. "Mr. Viviani evidently isn't held in great respect here. Think how the Boots looked at you!"

"You'll have to go through with it now," said the devils; "you'd look such a fool if you went. Buck up, you coward!"

"What would the Quiet Man say?" said the faithful voices. "Think! He trusts you. He believes in you. Some day he may grow to care for you. How would he like a Mountebank to think you cheap?"

"I think I'll go home," said the Princess.

"Bang!" The door flew open, and in came a supercilious waiter with lunch. Alas! the Princess was hungry. Alas! the Princess sat down.

"After all, the Mountebank mayn't come," said

the treacherous devils. "They have brought you a very nice lunch." So the weak-minded Princess sat down to the table and ate up the lunch.

"Now you've stayed, you might as well have coffee," said the devils. "And if you don't smoke, how silly you'll look, when you particularly asked for a room where you could do so."

So the imprudent Princess put her elbows on the table, and sipped her coffee, and told the devils she was enjoying her cigarette immensely, and that there was nothing so enjoyable as smoking. It was at this moment that the supercilious waiter announced Mr. Viviani; and directly the Princess saw him, she realised that he was indeed a Mountebank and all that the Jester said.

"Oh, how do you do?" said the Princess, and sat up very stiffly, and tried to look perfectly at ease and not in the least as if she were frightened.

"So beastly sorry if I've kept you!" said the Mountebank, with a false smile, and he shut the door on the supercilious waiter and drew a chair up to the Princess, and pushed his red face close to hers, as is the way of Mountebanks. "So awfully sweet of you to come and see me like this."

The Mountebank spoke in an affected mincing voice; and his face had coarse evil lines upon it, and all his features were blunted as if they had lost their shape through being painted and disguised so much. He looked a little like a butcher, and a little like a prize-fighter; and his clothes were all a little too spick-and-span, and his tie a little too bright, and his shoes a little too shiny; and altogether he looked like an imitation of a gentleman, and like nothing real at all. He could not have moved or spoken naturally to save

his life, and at any minute the Princess would not have been surprised if a label had shot out over his head, with "I AM A GENTLEMAN" printed on it.

"I came to see you about the play you sent the Jester," said the Princess quickly.

"The one you said he liked so much," said the Mountebank, with another false smile; and the Princess saw he had steely-blue eyes that were cruel and hard and did not smile with the rest of his face.

"Yes. He liked it so much that——" The Princess stopped blankly. She did not in the least know what to say.

"That he asked you to come and see me," said the Mountebank. "May I have a cigarette?" and the Mountebank took one of the Princess's cigarettes, and pulled his chair a little closer still and puffed the smoke in the Princess's face.

"He didn't exactly ask me," said the Princess, who felt she dare not leave go of the Jester's protecting hand altogether. "But he admired the play so much, and thought that there was so much good in it that—I thought you ought to know. He is so kind-hearted, I am sure he would like you to know; only, you see, he's not quite sure that there is enough money in it for the Public." The Princess paused, in a woeful tangle.

"I know," said the Mountebank. "That's what they always say. But unfortunately, business is business, isn't it? And I'm sure I only wish the Jester hadn't sent such a dear little girl to discuss it with me." And the Mountebank took hold of the Princess's hand.

"Go straight out of the room!" said the faithful voices, leaping up in a perfect fury.

"Don't be silly! he'll think you're afraid. Don't look as if you noticed anything. Sit perfectly still. Go on smoking. Show him you're a woman of the world, and not a frightened baby!" said the devils, who knew the weak side of the Princess to a T.

So the Princess tilted her chin carelessly and spoke in a lofty and indifferent voice, while the hand of the Mountebank held hers tightly, and the hard blue eyes of the Mountebank stared into hers, only three inches away.

"The Jester doesn't know I've come," said the Princess; "but I was so very interested in your play, I—I—I should so like the Jester to play it. I thought if you wrote again, and asked him to do it at a charity *matinée* or something like that—because, of course, if people could only see the play acted, it would help your name so much."

"What a little business woman it is, you dear little childie!" said the Mountebank, squeezing the Princess's hand till she could have killed him. And if it be hard to believe that any Mountebank could behave like this, yet be it understood that even Mountebanks are not accustomed to be called upon by perfectly strange young ladies, who order private rooms for interviews.

But even now the Princess sat still, for "Keep still, keep still!" said the devils. "This is seeing life. He won't talk to you if you show him how you hate him. It's all a new experience. You've never met anyone like him before, have you? It's very brave and original of you to have come to see him like this, and now that you are here, enjoy the experience."

"I want a light," said the Princess, who thought this a reasonable excuse to take her hand away.

"Light it from mine, dear!" said the Mountebank, sticking his coarse ugly face close to hers.

"I—I never can manage that way, thanks," said the Princess hastily, and struck one match after the other to keep her hands employed.

"So the Jester doesn't know you've come," said the Mountebank, and his eyes were very hard and cold. "I suppose he dropped a hint that he'd like to play the piece if the terms could be arranged, eh?"

"I don't understand you," said the Princess, and in spite of herself her voice trembled a little.

"My dear child, you don't mean to say you aren't up to the Jester's little game?" said the Mountebank.

"Of course he wants to get my play for nothing!"

"Oh!!!!" said the Princess, "you couldn't——"

"Quite sure he hadn't hinted anything of the kind to you? That charity *matinée* idea of yours, that was all your own idea, eh?" said the Mountebank.

"Jester wants a chance to show himself off in a new *rôle*, and thinks he'll use my play to do it. All for nothing!"

"As if he'd be so mean! As if I'd humiliate myself by asking you!" said the Princess, with tears in her eyes that almost drowned the little devils.

"There! I see you're not in it, childie. Why, you mustn't cry! My darling little girl, I wouldn't have hurt your feelings for the world. Bless the child, what am I to do with you?" said the Mountebank, with such an evil grin that the Princess felt her heart grow sick and cold.

"I—I think I will go," said the Princess.

"After coming all that way?" said the Mountebank, and he held the Princess's hand so tightly the Princess could not move.

"Shall I scream?" thought the Princess.

"You can't!" said the little devils. "You asked to see him. You've got to take the consequences."

"You can't!" said the faithful voices. "You must keep cool and get away, but you mustn't scream."

"Gentleman's in here, miss," said the voice of the waiter, and the Mountebank dropped the Princess's hand with an oath, as the door opened and a horrible scent of patchouli and powder entered, followed by a Yellow-haired Lady who was the sort of lady that is seen with Mountebanks.

"What are you doing in here?" said the Yellow-haired Lady, and she cast a furious glance at the Princess.

"Talking business," said the Mountebank, with an angry gleam in his hard blue eyes. The Yellow-haired Lady hesitated on the threshold.

"But we've finished," said the Princess. "I'm going," and she turned to gather up her purse and cigarette case.

"In one moment," said the Mountebank, and he looked at the Yellow-haired Lady.

"Oh, I wouldn't interrupt for worlds!" said she. "Only lunch has been getting cold this 'arf-hour, and I'm fairly sick of waiting. Still, if you're so particularly engaged—on business!" and flung out of the door.

"Staying at the hotel, simply a casual acquaintance," said the Mountebank, deftly edging between the Princess and the door. "It's disgraceful how some women will force themselves upon you."

"Will you please let me come?" said the Princess, and encountered the Mountebank's glittering eyes.

"My dear girl," said the Mountebank, with an

affected laugh, "you can't be seriously angry because a woman like that speaks to me. I can't help her following me about. Do you think I could like to be seen with a woman with hair as yellow as that? I'm perfectly ashamed of knowing her. Why, she isn't a *lady!*"

"He sees what she is; perhaps he isn't so bad," said the devils.

"He's a friend of hers," said the voices. "He's lying because he sees you despise her. And if he talks of his friend like that, how will he talk of you?" cried the faithful voices, growing stronger and stronger in the light of the Mountebank's wicked eyes.

"I do not see how your acquaintance with that lady can possibly affect me," said the Princess. "Would you please let me pass?"

"And leave me so angrily?" said the Mountebank. "Oh, I can't let you go till we've made friends. How can I?"

"Good heavens!" thought the Princess. "He's going to kiss me! Oh, he can't, he can't! I've only been silly, not wicked. I couldn't be punished like that!"

"Keep cool, keep cool!" said the faithful voices. "Don't show him you're frightened, whatever you do!"

"I must have a light before I go, mustn't I?" said the Princess, with quite a creditable smile. "Where are the matches? Did I leave the box upon the table?" said the Princess, holding the match-box tight within her hand.

"I can't see it," said the Mountebank, glancing round the room.

"Rush!" said the devils. "Get out of the room, whatever happens!"

"If you rush for the door, he'll rush too," said the voices. "Then you'll have a scene, and people in the hall will hear. Keep cool, keep cool!"

"Yes, I'll keep cool; but oh, somebody help me!" prayed the Princess. "I'll never be silly again, I promise, I promise!"

The Princess looked out of the window. There was the absolutely deserted street; not so much as a butcher's boy or passing urchin broke its stillness. "Oh, if someone, anyone, would come, they could see in through the window. I could attract their attention," cried the Princess in a desperate agony, while the Mountebank felt in all his pockets for a match.

Rattle, rattle, rattle! Down over the cobblestones clattered a cart. Horror of horrors! The Little Lieutenant was driving down the street.

"Oh! if I hadn't smiled at him this morning!" gasped the Princess. "Now he'll only think I'm flirting again. Why, he won't understand that I'm nice, any better than the Mountebank does. He'll see me with this creature in this room, alone; he can't be expected to guess how I'm feeling. Oh, what *will* he think?"

The cart drew up with a dash; the Little Lieutenant jumped down and threw the reins to the Boots; then he came on to the sidewalk; in another minute he would walk right past the window where the Princess stood.

"Here's a match!" said the Mountebank. "My last. Now, what are you going to give me for it?"

The Little Lieutenant went by the window, and looked in with a start.

"Help me! Help me! Help me!" cried the Princess's eyes, and the Princess looked at the Mountebank and then at the Lieutenant.

The Little Lieutenant stopped short.

"Come in! I'm in danger! Help me to get away from this man!" said the Princess's eyes as plainly as speech, and she stretched out her hand in a desperate gesture.

But the Little Lieutenant only turned away and went on more briskly than before, and the Princess's heart almost stood still with disappointment. For one moment she had had a wild hope that the Little Lieutenant would crash through the window.

"Now I'm going to light it for you, whether you want me to or not," said the courtly, chivalrous Mountebank. "You're such an independent little childie, ain't you?"

"Half a sec.," said the Princess, pretending to look for her handkerchief. Time, time, time! That was what she wanted!

What was that? The Lieutenant's voice was in the hall. "A room where he could smoke?" The voices were nearing the door. "Yes, there is a young lady in here, sir," said the waiter; and suddenly such a rapturous smile lit up the face of the Princess that the Mountebank stepped towards her, and goodness only knows what would have happened if the door had not opened and in strode the Little Lieutenant.

"Where *have* you been?" said the Princess, perfectly desperate, yet managing to infuse a truly sisterly resentment in her tone. "I had to have my lunch alone. It was horrid!"

"I'm so sorry; I'll explain about it after," said the Little Lieutenant, showing himself possessed of supernaturally histrionic powers. "Have you had tea yet?"

"No; I'm coming home now," said the Princess, with frantic, desperate appeal within her eyes.

"Then you needn't wait, Jim," said the Little Lieutenant, and closed the door upon the deeply interested waiter.

The Mountebank stood by the table, with a feeble smile.

"There's no hurry if you—I mean, shall I wait outside?" said the Lieutenant, looking first at the Mountebank, and then to the Princess for his cue.

"Don't go! don't go!" said the Princess's eyes.

"Just as you like," said the Princess. "But I don't think we've anything more to say, have we?" and the Princess turned to the Mountebank with a gracious but faltering smile.

"I have your Polcombe address, haven't I?" said the Mountebank, smiling too, but rather white about the lips. "Will you let me know what the Jester is going to do about that play?"

"I'm sure he doesn't mean to use it," said the Princess.

"Sure?" said the Mountebank, and he came a step nearer to the Princess and spoke softly so that the Little Lieutenant should not hear. But the Little Lieutenant had ears like a cat.

"Not when he knows you've been to see me—here?"

"He won't use it," said the Princess, trembling. "Good-bye!"

"I'll come over and see you at Polcombe, or I have

your town address also, haven't I?" said the Mountebank, and his mouth was set in an ugly line.

"Help me!" said the Princess's eyes despairingly.

"Do come," said the Little Lieutenant, and he crossed to the table between the Princess and the Mountebank, and laid his card down, looking all the time in the Mountebank's coarse face. "I shall be delighted to see you at Polcombe, or anywhere else that's equally quiet—and convenient. Now, am I to have the pleasure of throwing you out of the window, or are you going out by the door?" The Lieutenant's voice was so pleasant and *dégage*, the Princess thought she could not have heard aright.

"Is this a joke?" said the Mountebank, with a sickly smile.

"It will be a practical joke if you stay much longer," said the Little Lieutenant, still in the easy and pleasant manner. "Are you going?"

The Mountebank hesitated. The Lieutenant's hand stole to his hip-pocket, which was suspiciously lumpy. "I'm sure it isn't necessary to have a scene," said the Little Lieutenant, fingering something hard and shining. Something clicked. The Mountebank strolled carelessly to the door. His face was somewhat pale.

"You're making rather a fool of yourself, aren't you?" said the Mountebank. "Almost as big a fool as——"

The Lieutenant drew his hand from his pocket. The Mountebank stepped quickly from the room.

"Thought that 'ud settle him!" said the Lieutenant, handling a ferocious-looking Colt.

"It isn't loaded!" gasped the Princess.

"Isn't it?" said the Lieutenant, with a quite ab-

surdly youthful swagger. "You wanted him to go, didn't you?"

"Oh, please d-d-d-don't speak to me for just a minute," said the Princess, weakly. And, lo and behold! there was the brave and spirited Princess collapsed on a chair, sobbing her eyes out.

"Oh, Lord!" said the Lieutenant, and turned his back upon the Princess, and stood and gazed with frenzied interest at the stuffed pike upon the chimney-piece.

"You must think me such an awful sort of person," sobbed the Princess. "I—I—don't know—how—I can explain——"

"There's no need, really," said the Little Lieutenant. "I mean, don't tell me anything unless you want to, you know."

"I do want to," said the Princess, and began to cry again. "I never dreamed there could be such a cad in the world!"

"Look here!" said the Little Lieutenant; "you're not to say another word until you've had some tea or something."

"Oh, no, thank you," said the Princess. "I'd rather go straight home."

"I shall make it brandy in another minute," said the Little Lieutenant, in his quarter-deck manner. "You're as white as a sheet!"

"Oh, please—not brandy," said the Princess. "What will the hotel people think of me, as it is?"

"They think you belong to me," said the Little Lieutenant, and he rang the bell.

"I hate brandy," said the Princess imploringly.

"I'll help you with it, then," said the Little Lieutenant, with a grin.

"Tea for two, Jim, and a brandy and soda for one!" Actually he called the supercilious waiter by his Christian name, and seemed on the most friendly terms with him. Indeed, the supercilious waiter even bestowed a kind smile on the Princess as he left the room, for the Little Lieutenant had adopted such proprietary airs towards her that the Princess felt quite dazed.

"I shall be mistaking you for my real brother if you go on talking so—so confusingly," said the Princess.

"That's exactly what I want you to do!" said the chivalrous Lieutenant.

"Oh, how kind you are!" said the Princess, and the ever-ready tears came in her eyes again.

"For God's sake, don't cry!" said the Little Lieutenant, looking so horribly frightened that it made the Princess laugh.

Then the supercilious waiter entered again, and the Lieutenant made the Princess drink quite a teaspoonful of brandy and soda, and then tossed off the glass himself and ordered another; and then sat down to the table, and drank so many cups of tea and consumed such huge quantities of buttered toast that the Princess quite gasped.

"Fact is, I've had no lunch," said the Little Lieutenant, with a grin, as he met the Princess's astonished gaze.

"However was that?" said the Princess.

"Circumstances," said the Little Lieutenant; and his face was suddenly stern and thoughtful, and the Princess saw she must not ask questions.

"There is a mystery about him," thought the Princess. "Now I wonder where he has been

all the morning, and how it is he's so well known here! "

"Now you can tell me how it all happened," said the Lieutenant, concluding a truly gigantic tea. "Have a cigarette first? "

"Oh, no," said the Princess, blushing crimson.

"Oh, go on," said the Little Lieutenant, with a brotherly grin. "You must smoke, to show the waiter I approve."

So the Princess took a cigarette, and the Little Lieutenant did the same, and sipped at his third large brandy and soda while the Princess told her story.

"Well, you were a little ass! " said the Lieutenant when she finished. "You ought to have told him you'd made a mistake and walked out of the room directly you saw him."

"I know," said the Princess humbly.

"You never know how a cad like that may talk of you," said the Little Lieutenant, frowning.

"That's why I didn't want to offend him," said the Princess, rather white and shaky.

"Oh, Lord! you can't be afraid of cads like that! " said the Lieutenant haughtily, and he rose and stood by the fireplace with his hands rammed into his pockets.

The Princess sighed a sigh of relief. She could not help feeling that somehow the Little Lieutenant had taken all the responsibility upon his straight young shoulders.

"Now, how are you going to get home? " said the Little Lieutenant. "You'd better come with me."

"Oh, I can't do that, thanks," said the Princess. "I have my own trap. I don't want to trouble you any further."

"Rot!" said the Little Lieutenant. "We've got to keep up appearances. If you belong to me, it isn't natural we should each drive home alone."

"I was thinking of my friends," said the Princess, rather confused. "They might think it strange."

"Oh, I'll make it all right with them," said the Lieutenant loftily. And again the Princess felt the Little Lieutenant was seeing the whole thing through, and that it would only be foolish if she interfered. Then the Lieutenant rang for the bill, and the Princess flushed pink.

"You really must let me settle for mine!" said the Princess.

"Oh, please!" said the Little Lieutenant, as pink as the Princess.

"I insist!" said the Princess.

"That *would* give the show away," said the Little Lieutenant. "Besides, I couldn't possibly."

"I really mean it. Oh, please let me!" said the Princess, and the silly tears peeped out again.

"Oh, well, don't cry," said the Lieutenant, in a perfect agony. "You shall settle with me after."

So a hot and ashamed Princess sat still and wished there was no such thing as money in the world, while the Little Lieutenant paid her bill and lavishly tipped a broadly smiling waiter. Then the Lieutenant's cart came round to the door, and a distinctly subdued Princess climbed into it.

The now respectful Boots held the reins, while the Little Lieutenant went into the bar for a parting stirrup-cup, and incidentally spoke with the manager. Then he came out of the hotel, looking very manly and determined, while the obsequious manager followed, apologising to his irate back; and the Little

Lieutenant jumped into the cart and nodded curtly as they drove away. But when they left the streets of Udy behind, a broad grin overspread the youthful face of the Lieutenant.

"I've made it all right for you," said the Little Lieutenant.

"Oh, how?" said the Princess.

"I told the manager the Viviani chap had sent a begging letter to you," said the Little Lieutenant, and the grin widened. "And that he had seen better days once, and you knew his people—his mother had been your old nurse—so you'd come to him," said the Little Lieutenant, with pleasant recollections of his story.

"But—but the manager will find out he's not a beggar!" said the horrified Princess.

"I said he got his living by it," said the Lieutenant, who was a truly dashing liar in emergency. "Trading on his mother's name, and writing to the people who took an interest in her; and that he wrote threatening letters if people wouldn't fork out to him; and that he'd escaped jail so far because of his mother's worthiness, which made people slow to prosecute him. So now if he talks about you, I've queered his pitch, I think. In fact, as he isn't any too keen on Mr. Viviani and his lady friend, the manager rather thought of asking them to quit this afternoon; but I told him your name might be dragged in if there were a scene, so," said the Lieutenant, with a thoughtful grin, "I said I thought the wisest plan would be to make things generally unpleasant for him, which they are going to do."

"You are a perfect—admiral," said the Princess, and the Little Lieutenant grinned all over his face.

"Ain't it funny we should have got to know each other?" said he. "Just think—only this morning——"

"Doesn't it seem a long time ago?" said the Princess.

"Rather!" said the Little Lieutenant. "If anyone had told me I should have known you and liked you——"

"Liked me?" said the Princess.

"I thought you a bit of a rotter, you know," said the Lieutenant, with appalling frankness. "The sort of girl you have larks with."

"Oh!" said the Princess; and this innocent remark had a more salutary effect upon the Princess than the whole of her morning's experience.

Indeed, it was such a chastened Princess whom the Lieutenant drove up to the Artist's gate that the Artist did not even smile when he saw her escort, but asked the Lieutenant what had happened in a quite serious manner. Then the Princess left the Artist and the Lieutenant together, and rushed in to the Housewife. It must be said that she revived a little under the influence of the intense excitement with which the Housewife greeted her, and told her story with a due regard to its dramatic possibilities. But the Princess said nothing of the little opening scene with the Lieutenant, when a foolish and imprudent Princess had smiled and looked back at a perfect stranger.

"Well, I hope it's taught you a lesson," said the Housewife. "How frightfully exciting, though!"

"It has taught me a lesson I shall never forget," said the chastened Princess, and, indeed, she was properly subdued for quite three days.

IX.

THE FREE LANCE.

THE wind and the rain howled down the valley to the sea. The breakers boomed on the rocks at the mouth of the harbour, and every now and then broke with such a rush and splash it seemed as if they would sweep into the harbour, and great hurrying clouds moved swiftly in the sky. It was a truly stormy night.

The Princess was alone in the cottage on the hillside. The Artist and the Housewife had gone to Udy to meet the Knight. They had started in the afternoon, when the sun was shining, but the Princess had refused to go with them, because she was angry with the Knight for coming. "Becoming a miserable policeman!" as she had put it in the little note she had written and sent by the Artist to welcome him at the station. Besides which, the Princess had business of importance to keep her occupied at home. A whole week had elapsed since she had received the letter from the Prince which ended with "Now write and say you hate me, please!" to which the Princess had so obediently replied.

Now she sat in the little parlour, crammed with its ornaments and pampas grass and sea-shells, and wrote a second letter, while the landlady and her family sang mournful hymns in the kitchen. The Princess had only one consolation in the dreary world she was

inhabiting, and that was that the landlady's harmonium was safely locked up in the parlour where the Princess sat.

The lamp shone on the Princess's dejected head as she scribbled away on many sheets of writing paper. Another pile of sheets lay on the table in front of the Princess; they were covered thickly in the Princess's own handwriting, and every fifth or sixth sheet bore the words "Dear Prince." A frail little handkerchief and a lonely glove were placed like mournful trophies on the pile. A thoughtful wizard would have guessed from this that the Princess and the Prince had had a quarrel, and that the smarting Prince had sent back the Princess's letters.

"I know I have behaved abominably, and you can never forgive me," the Princess was writing. "I cannot think why I said all those dreadful insults to you. I suppose it is no use reminding you that you said 'Now write and hate me, please!' Oh, dear! I am so miserable and so wretched and so lonely, when I think of my wicked violent temper and the dreadful things it makes me say. Oh, dear Prince, don't say I've really hurt you!"

The tears rolled down the Princess's cheeks; every now and then she would wipe her eyes and look through the pile of ancient letters to make sure she had not said anything like this before. The Prince and the Princess had had many little quarrels even in those happy river days, and many anguished notes had passed between the post office at Cookham and the Princess's house. She was repenting now in sack-cloth and ashes, but still she did not wish to repeat herself.

"I do not ask you to forgive me," wrote the Prin-

cess; "I do not hope for it! I have lost the only friend who ever really understood me; but it is all my fault!"

Here the Princess held her weeping face as near the paper as possible; but, alas! the tame, unenterprising tears steadfastly refused to trickle anywhere but down the Princess's cheeks and on to her frock. So the Princess made tearful blots on the letter instead.

"I do not, as I say, dare to ask your pardon. Nothing can unsay those dreadful words I said. Nothing can ever make you respect me any more. I have branded myself a CAD for ever!"

The Princess here turned back to the very beginning of the letter, oh so many sheets away, and read through the touching composition, and wept from sheer sympathy as she did so. Then with a mournfully complacent air she folded the sheets into a bulky package, sealed it with sealing-wax of livid green, and addressed it to the Prince at Cookham.

Now the Princess was able to pay attention to the howling wind, which lashed the rain against the windows, and she drew up her chair to the fire and felt a dreary pleasure in listening to the fury of the storm. A quiet night would have irritated her at such a tragic moment of her life. A sudden draught nearly extinguished the lamp; the door that opened into the glass verandah that ran along the house outside flew open. Someone stumbled among the flower-pots and tapped at the Princess's door.

"Good gracious, who's that?" said the Princess.

"Me," said the Little Lieutenant, and the wind shot him into the room, while his terrier followed discreetly.

"I thought you'd be lonely," said the Little Lieutenant, as he took off his coat and hung it behind the door. "Also, I wanted someone to talk to. Also, what a beast of a night, isn't it? Can I stop till the Artist comes back? I've brought those brushes he wanted from Portsmouth."

"I don't know when he will be in, but please sit down," said the Princess, in as sad a voice as she could manage.

The Princess and the Lieutenant were the best of friends now, and there was no one in the world she would rather have seen at that moment, but she would not have allowed herself to be so fickle and so inconsistent as to smile.

"Isn't this cosy?" said the Lieutenant, with a grin, as he drew up his chair to the fire and put his feet on the bars to dry. "How ripping to see a fire! I say, you aren't smoking. Have one of mine. They're something rather good."

"No, thanks," said the Princess, finding the martyr-like air quite easy after all.

The rain rattled on the panes, the wind whistled in the chimney; the Little Lieutenant lit his pipe in a sociable manner, and the Princess gazed on the bulky letter addressed to the Prince at Cookham, and felt comfortably miserable.

"Anything the matter?" said the Little Lieutenant, looking up startled. The Princess had kept silence all the time while he had been lighting his pipe, almost a minute.

The Princess shook her head heroically; a tear trickled on to her nose. In breathless excitement she shook her head again. The tear splashed down right on to the name of the Prince and made a great blur—

and the Princess laid down the letter with the quiet happiness of one who has achieved.

"Why, you're crying!" said the Little Lieutenant. He was not in the least afraid of the Princess now. "Tell me all about it!"

The Little Lieutenant's voice was very nice and brotherly, and the Princess gave a contented sigh; then she screwed up the cushions and nestled her head into them comfortably, and gazed with melancholy sadness at the fire.

"Suppose," said the Princess, "suppose you had a friend whom you loved and respected enormously; and suppose you were dull, and wanted something exciting to do; and suppose you sat down and wrote the most insulting letter to him, and called him a mean dishonourable cad, and every name you could possibly think of that would hurt a self-respecting man; and then suppose he had written back to say he really could not understand you, and had sent back all your letters because you told him he would probably show them to people and brag. How should you feel?" propounded the Princess, with chastened interest.

"You didn't really accuse him of showing your letters to people?" said the Little Lieutenant, slightly shocked.

"That was about the least insulting of the things I said. You do not know what insulting letters I can write." The Princess spoke with a touch of natural pride. "They are the sort of letters and insults people can never forget even if they forgive, although I never really think them for a single moment. But when I begin a letter I like to make it an exciting one, and so I go on, saying one awful thing

after another. After all, when you start out to do anything, even writing insults, you ought to do it as well as you can," said the Princess virtuously. "I have a gift for insulting people, I suppose. It is rather hard I should lose all my best friends through it."

"Oh, but the chap will forgive you if you didn't mean it," said the Little Lieutenant, with easy consolation. "You must write and say you're sorry."

The Princess looked at him and hesitated; then she fingered the bulky letter.

"Well—the fact is—I—I have," said a rather shamefaced Princess. "But the point is, am I going to send it? It is such an abject letter."

"Course you must send it," said the Little Lieutenant.

"Will he despise me for writing it, though?" said the Princess, who saw with joy the prospect of an argument on motives, also feelings, the like of which the matter-of-fact Lieutenant had up till now avoided.

"Rather not," said the simple Lieutenant. "I know if I were in love with a girl, and she wrote me a beast of a letter, I should be jolly glad if she wrote to say she didn't mean it."

"Ah, but *I'm* not sure that the Prince is in love," said the Princess, viewing with delight the turn the conversation had now safely taken. "We're only very great friends."

"Oh, rot!" said the Little Lieutenant, glancing at the table. "He would not have kept your letters, and that handkerchief and glove, if——"

"It's extremely rude of you to look!" said the Princess quickly, and extremely pink. "As it happens, my letters are well worth keeping, simply as

letters. I don't say absolutely that the Prince is *not* in love, but the vacillating affection that he has for me is not one half nor a quarter so strong as his vanity, and I know I have hurt that most desperately."

"Oh, well, I shouldn't worry about him if he's a conceited chap," said the Little Lieutenant, rather puzzled.

"He's not in the least conceited," said the Princess hotly. "Only, how can he ever trust me again? However nice I am, he will know at any moment I may turn round and insult him."

"But if he knows you really like him, he oughtn't to take any notice till you come out of your fit of temper," said the Little Lieutenant, valiantly trying to follow the Princess on her tortuous wanderings.

"You can't understand anyone being sensitive, I suppose?" said the Princess ungratefully.

"Look here, do you want to be friends with this chap?" said the Lieutenant, becoming rather desperate.

"Frightfully!" said the Princess, and honestly felt that in all life's goods there was nothing worth looking at if the Prince's friendship were to be withheld from her.

"Do you think he wants to be friends with you?" said the Little Lieutenant bluntly.

"Yes," said the Princess rather resentfully. "I'm sure he enjoys being friends; he's so very dull at Cookham, and we're so intensely interested in each other."

"Then send that letter and chance it," said the Little Lieutenant.

"He will despise me for writing, I know he will," said the Princess tearfully. "He will think me an abject idiot."

"Do you want the letter to go?" said the Lieutenant, and his tone betokened a rising exasperation.

"With all my heart!" said the Princess fervently. "I should be perfectly happy if it were in the post and no longer in my hand."

"Then be happy!" said the Little Lieutenant, and, lo and behold! the Princess's hands were empty.

"You beast!" said a furious Princess. "Give it back at once! I don't want it to go! I never meant to send it for a single moment!"

"Well, it's gone now," said the Lieutenant, and he put it in his pocket. "It's as good as in the post," and he gave his pocket a firm little slap.

"Give it back!" said the Princess.

"Not a bit of it!" said the Little Lieutenant, with a court-martial attitude. "You say you've insulted this chap, so you ought to beg his pardon; and if he doesn't forgive you, it serves you right for being so silly as to quarrel with people you like. If I give it you back, you'll only sit there and discuss it all the evening. That wouldn't be very interesting, would it?"

The Princess preserved an injured silence.

"Hullo! you've got a harmonium," said the Little Lieutenant, and sat down on the stool. "What a beautiful, wheezy, noisy, rattling dear of a harmonium!" said he, with a rapturous grin. "Oh, I say! Oh, I *can* make a noise! Now I'm going to sing to you."

Then the Little Lieutenant broke forth into full-throated song, in a bass roar that flooded the little room and even rose above the crashing din he made on the harmonium.

This was the chorus, sung in a cheerful yell to a swinging, breathless, prestissimo valse tune:

<i>(Crescendo)</i>	"Poor old mother,	
<i>(P. P.)</i>	Now she can 'ardly see!	
<i>(Tenderly)</i>	Ever since I	
	'Ave bin so 'igh,	
<i>(Fortissimo)</i>	She's bin a good un to me!	<i>(Animato.)</i>
<i>(Con passione)</i>	I must work for mother,	
	Work on any'ow;	
<i>(Brightly)</i>	She's old and grey,	
	But she shan't go away	
<i>(Forte)</i>	To the workhouse naow!"	

Then the Lieutenant sang, with enormous emotion and the tremolo stop full out:

"'Tis only a leaf, this hemblem of grief,
Plucked from the grave of my mother, my idil,
So treat it with cyare, and let it lay there,
The little green leaf in the Bibil,"

and paused, voiceless.

"What beautiful, what exquisite, what truly rapturous songs!" said the Princess, who had absolutely forgotten there was a Prince at Cookham. "I never heard anything so noisy in my life. Where *did* you learn them?"

The Little Lieutenant rose from the harmonium and lit his pipe, trying not to look pleased.

"The sailors sing 'em," said the Little Lieutenant, with becoming modesty. "One of 'em always has a concertina, and they sit in the fo'castle and sing to it. So I picked 'em up. You'd be pretty hard up for something to do if you were stationed at the rotten billets I get. Just think! Three years in a stinking Gulf, with only an Arab or two to see if you land."

"Three years!" said the Princess.

"And six weeks' leave at the end of it, and the three years again, I bet on the farthest, rottenest station the Admiralty knows, God bless 'em!" said the Little Lieutenant. "And my leave's up in a fortnight now—one single solitary fortnight!"

"Oh, hard *lines*!" said the Princess.

"It is, rather," said the Little Lieutenant simply, and the stern set look came into his face again and made him look strangely old.

"If you've only six weeks," said the Princess, and hesitated. She was rather frightened of the Lieutenant; but her curiosity was so great and so active and so lively, it gave her a push, and out came the question that had been on her lips ever since she had first seen the Lieutenant come out of the inn. "Whatever makes you stay here?" said the Princess, and could have bitten her tongue through directly she had said it. "I didn't say it. I didn't mean to be so dreadfully impertinent," said the Princess, in a perfect panic. "It's my disgusting tongue. It says things really before I've any idea what it's going to say."

"Oh, that's all right," said the Little Lieutenant; and then he began to laugh because the Princess looked so dreadfully embarrassed and repentant. "It's really all right," said the Little Lieutenant. "I don't in the least mind telling you."

"Oh, how awfully nice!" said the Princess. "Oh, I have wanted to know, so dreadfully badly!"

"You mustn't tell anyone!" said the Lieutenant.

"Oh, no, of course not," said the Princess, with delightful ease. "I shouldn't think of such a thing! Go on, please! I want to know *all* about her."

"Her?" said the Little Lieutenant.

"I'm sure it's something to do with a her," said the Princess coaxingly. "At least, I hope it is, because you would be in love with a girl so nicely. You are just the sort of person to make a woman happy," said the Princess, feeling vaguely this was the sort of thing they said in plays.

The Little Lieutenant sighed, but this was a real sigh, not a Princess sigh. Then he took his pipe out of his mouth while he spoke, and the Princess noticed and felt thrilled by this little touch of respect he paid to his lady's name.

"You won't think it very exciting," said the Little Lieutenant. "She only my cousin. We were brought up together. Then I went into the Navy, and she was sent to boarding-school."

"Go on!" said the Princess breathlessly, and the Little Lieutenant saw she was truly interested in his little love affair.

"Well, when I came back she had turned out a beauty," said the Little Lieutenant slowly. "She had always been the dearest girl in the world to me, but I couldn't help seeing she had altered. It's no use trying to tell you how pretty she is; you must see her some day. And she's the dearest, sweetest, pluckiest girl in England!"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said the Princess, more excited than words can tell with such a beautiful, romantic confidence.

"Well, you see," said the Little Lieutenant, and his face was grave again, "I haven't a lot of money; and, now she's turned out a beauty, her people want her to make a big match; and they've tried to stop me seeing her. They pretend it's because I'm a bad lot and all that sort of rot, but that's a *lie*! I'm not

a canting teetotaller, but how could I be anything but a decent sort all round when I've had her to care for and think of ever since I was a youngster?"

"Oh!" said the Princess, quite aghast, "how mean! I'm sure you're a decent sort. I never am wrong about people, and I'd trust you more than any one I know, almost. Oh, surely, if she knows you, she will trust you too, whatever they say about you!"

"Rather!" said the Little Lieutenant, and it is impossible to describe the love and loyalty and pride in that word "Rather." "She'll stick to me, God bless her! She's staying with an old hag of an aunt the other side of Udy: that's why I've come here. I daren't stay too near, or the old witch would get to know and take my little girl away; but I drive into Udy every day, and I see her sometimes, though we don't always have a chance to speak. But now I'm going away for three more solitary miserable years; and they stop my letters to her, and so there is no means of writing; and God knows what 'll happen before I come back again."

The Little Lieutenant stopped, and stared into the fire.

"Oh, you poor, poor little thing!" thought the Princess; but she could not find anything to say that would help at all. Three whole solitary years, and without even letters to bridge them.

"I should marry her before you went," said the Princess recklessly.

"I couldn't quite do that," said the Little Lieutenant. "It would be rather caddish to leave my wife on the hands of her people when I've played a trick on them. And I've only my pay. I couldn't ask her to stay by herself and starve for three years on that."

"You don't think in time you might grow out of caring?" said the Princess timidly. "I mean," she said hastily, for the Little Lieutenant looked up, amazed, "boys are so often in love, and forget."

"I'm not a howling cad," said the Little Lieutenant, and he said it very simply, without any bluster or youthfulness at all. "I don't suppose I've made you understand what a rotten time she's had through me."

"Oh, I'm so glad there are some men like you in the world!" said the Princess. "I mean, I know so many Mountebanks, and Poets—and—and Princes; and it is so nice to feel there are men left who have old-fashioned ideals about honour, and don't only think of love as a means of amusement, just to kill time, but can love a woman unselfishly and loyally and faithfully, and aren't ashamed of doing so."

The tears were in the eyes of the foolishly romantic Princess.

"Don't tell anyone, there's a dear girl," said the Little Lieutenant, rather abashed.

"No," said the Princess.

"We're real pals, ain't we?" said the Little Lieutenant, and the Princess nodded.

"I love her," said the Princess. "Will you really let me see her?"

"Of course," said the Little Lieutenant. "She wants to see you."

"Me!" said the Princess.

"I've told her all about you, and she's awfully interested," said the Little Lieutenant. "I'd love you to be pals. You'd get on so jolly well, and it's so beastly lonely for her while I'm away."

"Oh, I do think you're nice!" said the Princess,

and she spoke very earnestly; "because it shows you can't think me such a little silly rotter after all."

"Well, what do you think?" said the Little Lieutenant, and the Princess heaved a truly thankful sigh.

"Hullo there!" said the voice of the Artist outside among the flower-pots, and the Princess jumped up with a cry of delight.

"I say, are you awfully wet?" said the Princess.

"Not a bit," said the Artist, divesting himself of his greatcoat outside, while the Princess hastily swept the letters and trophies from the table.

"Did you think we were never coming?" said the Housewife, appearing like a beautiful vision of laughter and raindrops in the doorway; and she laughed still more when she saw the Little Lieutenant by the fireside.

Then the Artist came in, loaded with bundles; and, curiously enough, he laughed in the same amused way when he saw the Little Lieutenant. "Lisbeth was afraid you'd be lonely," he said to the Princess carelessly, and the Little Lieutenant grinned.

Then a tall straight figure in a macintosh bent his head in the door, and seemed entirely to fill the little room.

"Oh, you dear old thing!" said the Princess; "I'm so glad you've come!"

It can scarcely be a matter of wonder that the Knight looked astonished, when one thinks of the fierce little note of welcome, or rather of warning, that had lain in his pocket all the way on that windy, cheerless drive from Udy.

As for the Artist and the Housewife, a most wonderful expression of thankful relief passed over their

faces, for the Princess's hearty welcome was obviously as sincere as it was reassuring.

"Isn't this jolly?" said the Princess, beaming round on them all; and the Artist smiled back his answer, for he and the Princess and the Knight had a special little manly palship all to themselves.

Then the Housewife departed to take off her hat, and the Artist walked down to the gate with the Little Lieutenant, who tactfully insisted on withdrawing. The Knight and the Princess heard them talking at the gate. The rain was over now, and the wind was hurrying along the clouds so fast that every now and then one stumbled and the moon peeped through. The Knight stood on the rug with his pipe in his mouth and his back to the fire, and the Princess curled herself up in the big arm-chair and smiled up at him.

"It's so nice to see you again!" said the Princess.

The Knight took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at her in stupefaction.

"Well, you are a——" He stopped. No word presented itself to his intelligence as adequate.

"Do you know what was in the letter you sent me by the Artist?" said the Knight.

"Insults," said the Princess happily. "I was angry when I wrote it."

"You are a caution!" said the Knight. "If you knew what a drive it's been! You might sometimes remember a chap has feelings."

"Were you very miserable?" said the Princess, trying not to look indecently gratified.

"I never like you making an ass of yourself," said the Knight, who was not an absolute fool, and had seen the Princess's triumphant smile.

"Oh, are you talking about the Prince?" said the Princess airily. "Oh, that's all done with. We've quarrelled."

The Princess suddenly stopped; a pale expression came into her face; then she sat up and the cushions dropped off her chair.

She had just remembered the letter that lay in the Lieutenant's pocket—the foolish abject letter that had set off on its journey to the Prince.

"It serves you jolly well right for talking so much," said the Princess severely to her furious self. "If you'd only kept quiet, the Lieutenant would not have taken that letter. Now you've gone down on your knees in the post to a man who doesn't care a snap of his fingers for you, and for whom you care exactly the same." And the Princess registered a solemn vow, for the one hundredth and thirtieth time, that she would never talk about her private affairs to anyone again.

"What's up now?" said the Knight.

"Oh, n—nothing of consequence," said the Princess, and looked up at the Knight's troubled blue eyes.

"Who's this Lieutenant chap?" said the Knight, with a savage frown, and the Princess dimpled wickedly.

"The Free Lance," said the Princess. "He rescued me. Did you hear how romantically? I must tell you all about it some day. It's too long to go through to-night. Still, as you have the Knight's place, I have to call him the Free Lance, whatever place I may give him in my heart," said the Princess, trying to look shy,—but with dimples that spoilt the effect.

The Knight jammed his tobacco into his pipe with a vicious finger, and the Princess relented.

"Don't quarrel!" said the Princess pleadingly.

"You've always someone new," said the Knight.

"The more new people I see, the more it makes me love my old friends," said the Princess.

The Knight preserved a sulky silence. He had heard this several times before.

"My cushions have fallen down," said the Princess.

The Knight picked up a cushion; the Princess's hand was somehow in his. The hint of a smile hovered round the corner of the Knight's exceedingly well-shaped mouth.

"You wrote a perfectly brutal letter; you didn't even trouble to come down and meet me, and I find you alone—with a Little Lieutenant. You don't in the least deserve it!" said the Knight, trying to look stern and not succeeding.

"I'm so glad to see you!" said the Princess, and the Knight's blue eyes began to laugh.

"Let's be pals!" said the Princess.

The Princess's hand was still in the Knight's; the step of the Artist was heard on the path; there was not a minute to lose.

"Do be pals!" said the Princess.

So the Knight and the Princess made friends.

X.

THE KNIGHT.

I HAVE written a poem," said the Princess. The Knight and the Princess sat on the cliffs.

The sun blazed down on the waters, and the whole of the ocean spread itself in a wide misty blue sheet as far as the eye could see. The sea-gulls perched on the rocks below, like splashes of foam, and the grey stone houses straggled inland from the harbour, helter-skelter, one on top of the other, right away up into the green funnel of the valley.

The Princess's hair shone in the sunlight, and her blue muslin hat lay like a frilly flower by her side, and the Princess's frock ruffled up on the grass in millions of flounces, that tumbled over each other and foamed up and down as if they were trying to mimic the blue-green waves.

The Knight lay at the Princess's feet and looked up at her from under the shade of his straw hat. Now and then the Princess would bestow an absent smile upon the Knight, but most of the time her eyes were fixed on the sea, and her face, tilted up, drank in the sunshine and the sea-breeze and the dancing, radiant, sparkling happiness of the morning.

"I have written a poem," said the Princess, and the Knight woke up with a start from his dreams.

"Should you like to hear it?" said the Princess.

"If it isn't very long," said the Knight, unable to resist such an obvious temptation.

Then the Princess raised her head with hauteur; and the Knight begged her pardon humbly, and said he would like to hear very much, even if it were fifteen cantos.

"It is only a tiny one," said the Princess. "I made it up this morning in bed, and I think it is awfully sweet. The idea is that I am a flame, and my Knights and Slaves, and—and Poets and Princes—are moths."

"Not a very new idea, is it?" said the Knight.

"It is not supposed to be," said the Princess. "I was only explaining the poem is written to—someone who said he was a bit frightened of liking me—because I was—a flame. Now, don't talk so much, but listen a bit;" and the Princess said this poem with her eyes fixed on the sea, as if she saw right across to—never mind where:

"You call me a flame!

A flame that is flickering, thing of a day,
Blown hither and thither as restless I sway.
Wind-swept by stray currents, unstable, untrue,
That dazzles a moment the moths such as you.
Yet so long as I stand,
Alone in the open, by every breeze fanned,
With the swift under-currents a-sweeping me by,
Can I help if the moths in my shadow-light fly?
True, the moths flutter down, but if some summer night
Your strong hand imprisoned the wavering light
And away from the eddies the flame you should turn,
Steadily there in your heart I would burn,
If I were a flame!"

"Oh, I do think it's sweet!" said the easily pleased Princess.

The Knight cast stones in the sea and was silent.

"Don't you like it?" said the Princess, in genuine surprise. "I think it is a dear little poem. You *are* horrid!"

"It's rather giving yourself away, isn't it?" said the Knight, still aiming at the distant sea-gulls.

"Not in the least," said the Princess. "It's only an argument. I say—to the someone—*if* your hypothesis were true, such and such things might happen, and should I be to blame? But I do not grant the hypothesis. I thought it was extremely clever the way I finished up. If I'd said '*As* I am a flame,' that might be giving myself away, but '*if* I were a flame' comes like a nice little slap in the face."

"Who's it to?" said the Knight, in a would-be careless tone.

The Princess dimpled.

"I want your opinion on it simply as a work of art," said the Princess. "I don't mind telling you it's not to you."

"I never imagined it was," said the Knight, and his tone had little of the courtliness a true Knight's voice should show. "Who is it?"

"If I tell you, it becomes a personal matter, and your judgment is biassed at once," said the Princess. "Besides, I'm not going to tell you."

"I know!" said the Knight, with an unhappy but would-be-scornful laugh.

"I'm sure you don't," said the Princess.

"It's the Prince," said the Knight, and shot stones at the gulls with precision.

"My hat!" said the Princess. "As if I'd write stuff like that to the Prince! In the first place, he would swell with conceit till I tremble to think what

might happen; in the second place, he would be so frightfully embarrassed, he wouldn't know where to look when we met; and in the third place, he is as weak as weak, and couldn't look after me even if he wanted to; and to do him justice," said the Princess honestly, "I don't think such a ridiculous idea has ever entered his head. Does that make you happier?"

"Not particularly," said the Knight. "I think I'd rather it was the Prince than——"

"Than?" said the Princess, rather breathless.

"Than the Little Lieutenant," said the Knight, and splash went a stone in front of the sea-gull. The gull flapped its wings and rose in the sky, and soared right away, perhaps to Uganda! As for the Princess, she looked at the Knight as if to ask "Could anyone be so stupid?" Then she saw his unhappy expression, and beheld a means of amusement.

"I said I wasn't going to tell you," said the Princess, trying to look shy.

"Then it is the Little Lieutenant," said the Knight, and the Princess preserved a non-committal silence. The frown between the Knight's eyes deepened, but he did not look at the Princess; and, stranger still, he did not seem angry.

"Now what's the matter?" thought the Princess. "That doesn't look like jealousy. Yet what can he have on his mind?"

"I rather want to tell you something," said the Knight.

"Then I don't want to hear, thanks," said the Princess quickly. "I'm sure it's something unpleasant, by your tone, and I don't want this beautiful morning spoiled."

"You seem pretty sure it's something horrid," said the Knight.

"Quite sure," said the Princess. "I always know when you're going to lecture me. Put it off for a bit, there's a dear!"

"I've got to tell you," said the Knight.

"Oh, well, not just this minute. Give me ten minutes," said the Princess, in a frightened rush. "You must let me down gently. In ten minutes I should be more prepared."

"I'm not at all anxious to tell you," said the Knight grimly.

The Princess wavered for a moment between her frantic curiosity and her never-failing presentiment that some particularly unattractive sin of hers had found her out. But the morning was so delicious that the Princess snatched at her respite, and hurriedly shut the door on that nasty, attentive little friend called Conscience.

"Let's talk about my kingdom," said the Princess, determined to make the most of her ten minutes. And she threw back her head and looked at the sea and the sunshine. "Oh, dear!" said the Princess, "I wish the world were smaller! It's so terrible to look across those miles and miles of sea, and think the people you love best of anyone are on the other side, and you can't get at them. Oh, if I could fly to—New Zealand!" said the Princess, for the Knight had looked up sharply.

"To my dear little godchild," said a matronly Princess. "Her name is Joan, and she is only just born, and I have never seen her; and I love Fred and Rhoda more than anyone in the world almost, and yet I never may see them again!" And the Princess

blew kisses across the sea that came from the deepest depths of her heart.

"Oh, your New Zealand cousins," said the Knight, somewhat relieved.

"Yes," said the Princess. "Just think, last year they were here, and now they're in New Zealand again! And I do love them so much! Oh, I do hate distance! Why, the Poet will soon be in a distant land!"

"Thank God!" said the Knight, in a voice of thanksgiving.

"Now, why do you say that?" said the Princess, irritated. "He is the most interesting person I know, and the most charming."

"I'd rather you were in love with the Little Lieutenant than the Poet," said the Knight viciously. "Thank God he's going out of England, and let's hope he'll stop there!"

"Well, you *are* mean!" said the Princess. "Fancy being glad because I'm losing a friend!"

"My dear girl, it's only because I'm afraid for you," said the Knight.

"Afraid!" said the Princess loftily.

"I don't want you to be like all the other silly women," said the Knight. "Poets only amuse themselves, and forget."

"And do you think I shouldn't forget?" said the Princess, with majestic amazement. "If there is one thing that makes me angry, it is the insufferably protecting, patronising attitude my friends assume to me whenever the Poet's name is mentioned. No wonder the poor man is conceited, if all you men make such fools of yourselves when you hear his name," said the Princess, skilfully carrying the war into the

enemy's country. "If you *mention* him, men bristle. If I were jealous, and afraid of the Poet's power, I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of knowing it. I am only telling you as a friend," and the Princess looked over the Knight's head from inaccessible heights of wisdom.

"Unfortunately, we know what fools women make of themselves. Look at the way in which you talk of him," said the Knight, assaulting the heights with dash.

"I love the Poet; I worship, I adore the Poet—as a Poet!" said the Princess. "I would love him to make love to me, in poetry, because he would present me in such a beautiful light to the world. He is not a man. He is only a rainbow. I like him in my kingdom as an ornament."

"That's all right as long as the rainbow is shining, but when it has vanished the kingdom may look a bit dreary and dull," said the Knight, rising to the occasion with unexpected skill.

"The charm of a rainbow is in the way it flits about," said the Princess. "It wouldn't be half so enchanting if it were always there. In fact, one wouldn't notice it. You know you confuse the Poet with the man all the time, and that's so silly of you."

"My dear girl——" said the Knight.

"I did think you would know by this time that I could only really care for a man with strength," said the Princess, not taking the faintest notice. "A man who would love one woman only, and just want to take care of her; someone whom I could look up to, and respect and be afraid of. And you're afraid of my breaking my heart for a Poet!"

"Then, why do you talk of him so much?" said the Knight.

"Because he interests me," said the Princess.

"I don't like your knowing him at all," said the Knight between his teeth. "He's not the sort of man you ought to know."

"My dear boy," said the Princess, "you're talking like your mother. Poets are not always patterns for your mother's Sunday-school. It is a pity, but you must blame Nature, who created Poets. After all, you like the books he writes."

"I can't understand how that chap writes them," said the Knight.

"He writes such beautiful books said the Princess, "because he loves the whole world, as I do, every bit of it that's beautiful; and so I am glad he loves me—a little," said the Princess triumphantly. "It would be most unflattering if he didn't."

"Your whole face lights up when you speak of him," said the Knight jealously.

"When I'm listening to the Poet, or even thinking of the Poet," said the imaginative Princess, "it's as if a whole big orchestra were sweeping me away. I'm lifted up into the stars. I can hardly breathe for happiness and excitement. But one doesn't want to listen to music for more than an hour or two at a time, even though one may be in heaven for that hour." And the Princess looked up at the skies, as if listening to the Poet reading verses.

"But for that hour at least you're in love," said the Knight, watching enviously.

"Never in this world," said the Princess, alighting on earth with a very firm tread. "It's purely an impersonal happiness, just as music is impersonal or a

beautiful picture. I'm in far more danger of falling in love with an ordinary quiet man, yet no one warns me against falling in love with likely people. Why don't people warn me against you?"

"Because they may think I should make you happy," said a suddenly aspiring Knight.

A pitiful silence settled down upon the radiance of the morning.

"They're wrong, though; aren't they?" said the brave Knight, with a not very successful laugh. "Because I'm not strong enough, or clever enough, of course."

The Princess stole a glance at the Knight and saw his honest blue eyes that looked out so sternly, and the firm set lines of his mouth and jaw, and the way he held his head up, straight, erect, as a brave Knight's should be.

"Oh, you're sorry for him," said the soft and silky little devil, stroking the Princess's heart with tender insidious fingers. "Dear, brave Knight! Think how he has served you!"

"And Uganda is miles away," said the lively young devil called Love-of-Excitement. "Say something nice. Don't laugh!"

"No, don't laugh and make fun," said the silky devil. "Just sigh and look gentle."

So the Princess sighed and looked gentle.

"It's not much fun to be a Knight with nothing to look forward to," said the Knight. "What is his reward?"

"You serve me till you die," said the Princess generously. "Then I put flowers on your grave."

"That's not much fun, for the Knight," said the Knight, looking always at the sea.

"Oh, you are so sorry for him!" said the soft and silky devil, taking out a treacherous pocket-handkerchief and sobbing pitifully in the Princess's impressionable ear.

"I know I am," said the Princess's real self.

"Oh, go on!" said the lively young devil. "For fun!"

"For shame!" said the Princess's real self, suddenly crimson.

"Well, of course, you must be faithful to the Quiet Man out there in Uganda!" said the soft and silky devil, suddenly changing his tactics. "Yet if it were not for being faithful——"

"There would be no harm in having a bit of excitement," said that wicked, persistent, horrible lively devil, who always was pricking the Princess's elbow.

"I *won't* flirt!" said the Princess's real self indignantly. "And not because of being faithful to another man, but because I love the Knight with my whole heart, and I wouldn't make fun, or hurt him, or deceive him for anything in the world."

"You shall marry the sweetest girl in the world, dear old Knight," said the Princess, with a rush, "a Tailor-made Girl, who plays hockey and rides like a bird, and comes down to breakfast in her best frock every Sunday." The Princess was only human. "And she will simply adore you, and never make you feel ashamed of her, and hot, and angry; and your mother will love her as a daughter, and you will be perfectly happy."

The Knight continued to throw stones, not wildly excited at the prospect.

"But she shan't come with you when you come to

stay at my fairy house," said the Princess, with a tenderly conciliatory glance.

"Then I shan't want to come," said the Knight, who was quite capable of defending himself on occasion.

"Oh!" said the Princess, somewhat nonplussed. "All right, you needn't. But I won't have any disgusting Tailor-made Girl tramping through my kingdom, with her hockey-stick, however much you marry her."

"As she's to tramp beside me, we shall have to tramp outside together," said the Knight.

"Go and tramp, then," said the Princess viciously. "I don't want you!"

"I'm perfectly aware of the fact," said the Knight.

"You're always worrying me and lecturing me," said the Princess, trying to feel aggrieved.

"That reminds me," said the Knight. "The ten minutes are up."

"Well, that is a mean revenge," said the Princess indignantly.

"Revenge?" said the Knight. "For what?" And he looked at the Princess with such steely unconsciousness that the Princess felt rather foolish.

"For having seen the silly Poet," said the Princess, recovering her ground. "I've never had *that* lecture yet."

"As a matter of fact, this *has* something to do with the Silly Poet," said the Knight, and his tone was alarming.

"Don't call him that," said the Princess cap-tiously.

"It's your name for him," said the Knight.

"When I or the Jester say it, it sounds rather sweet," said the Princess crushingly. "But when *you* say it, it simply seems absurd."

"Well, the Mountebank Cad, if you like that better," said the Knight, in not the very best of tempers.

"As a matter of fact, I am not at all sure he is a cad," said the Princess loftily. "He simply did not understand my motives, which is very natural. I hope I shall meet him again some day, so that I can explain myself to him."

"I really shall have to tell you," said the Knight, "although it's a beastly unpleasant thing to do."

The Princess expressed her indifference by destroying the herbage.

"I went into the hotel at Udy last night," said the Knight slowly, "and the Lieutenant was there; so was the Mountebank. I'm sorry to say your name was mentioned."

"And the Little Lieutenant went for him?" cried the Princess, with a shriek of joy. "And killed him!"

"On the contrary, the Mountebank went for the Lieutenant, and blacked both his eyes," said the Knight, with scarcely the amount of sympathy the occasion demanded.

"I knew there must be a reason why the dear little thing hasn't come up to see me this morning, and his last morning, too," said the Princess, even more ecstatically. "I've been wondering where he was all the time. Oh, dear little, poor little, brave little thing! I wish that Mountebank were dead!"

"He is, pretty nearly," said the Knight grimly.

"I've only left enough life in him to let him fully appreciate his injuries."

"You!" said the Princess. "Do you mean that *you* hurt him?"

"I hope so," said the Knight; then he looked at the Princess, and laughed rather sorely. "I'm sorry it was I who did it, and not the Little Lieutenant."

"It was very sweet of you, I'm sure," said the Princess, but she was looking down into the town.

"You don't care a button what I do," said the Knight.

"Oh, yes, I do," said the Princess.

"My dear girl," said the Knight. "You're absolutely uninterested."

"I confess I was looking to see if there was a sign of the Little Lieutenant," admitted the Princess candidly. "But you might remember it's his last morning, and how fond I am of him."

"I know," said the Knight, and his eyes looked hard and miserable. "I haven't told you the worst thing yet," said he. "I—I'm afraid you'll mind so dreadfully. I'd give everything I have not to tell you, but now that I know it for certain, I must!"

"Oh, don't!" said the Princess, visibly paling.

"It wasn't only your name the Mountebank mentioned," said the Knight, with deadly deliberation.

"Well?" said the Princess.

"He mentioned the name of the girl the Lieutenant had been tea-ing at the hotel that afternoon," said the Knight, and the tragedy in his voice has seldom been equalled on the stage.

"What!" said the Princess breathlessly.

"It's quite right," said the Knight, miserably reck-

less now the plunge was taken. "I saw them together myself! And she's horribly pretty—prettier than you; you might as well know it all. And the Lieutenant's as dead in love with her as a man can be."

"Well, of course," said the Princess.

The Knight looked as if the skies were quietly descending.

"I'm longing to see her," said the Princess. "It's his cousin, you know."

"You know he's in love?" said the Knight.

"I've known for ages," said the Princess. "Go on with the horrible news."

"It—it was that," said the Knight.

"That?" said the Princess. "But why should I mind? Oh—oh—oh!!! " And suddenly the Princess threw back her head and pealed with laughter. "You thought—I—was—in—love—with—the—Little Lieutenant!!! " gasped the Princess. "Oh, my darling boy, I do wish you wouldn't worry your head about me so! "

"My dear girl," said the Knight, "I'm intensely pleased if you really don't care for this chap, but allow me to mention that you've left no stone unturned to convince me that you do."

"Only to make you angry, you silly!" said the Princess.

"It didn't make me angry," said the Knight, "because I saw he didn't care a button for you. I was only extremely sorry for you, and anxious to keep you from—if you will have it—making a fool of yourself again."

The Princess tried to convey an impression of pleased amusement by her smile.

"Perhaps you think the Little Lieutenant shares your views?" said the Princess.

"I don't know what the Little Lieutenant thinks," said the Knight, beginning to throw stones again. "I've no reason to believe he's more modest than the ordinary run of men."

"It's not quite fair to judge people by yourself," said the Princess temperately. "As a matter of fact, the Lieutenant and I are confidants. We exchange our troubles. He tells me all about his cousin, and I tell him all about the Prince."

"How nice for the Prince!" said the Knight. "Do you, by any chance, tell the Little Lieutenant about me?"

"Good gracious, no! Why should I?" said the Princess, with cruel surprise, and the Knight maintained a bitter silence.

"Why, here is the Little Lieutenant!" said the Princess, and waved her hand. "Oh, you poor little thing!" said the Princess, as the Little Lieutenant climbed up the hill and presented a battered parti-coloured countenance to her sympathetic eyes.

"I simply had to come and say good-bye," said the Little Lieutenant. "But I'm more than a bit of a wreck!"

"I've heard all about it. The Knight saw your cousin too!" said the Princess, making room for the Little Lieutenant to sit down beside her. "He's been telling me how pretty she is, prettier than me," said the Princess. "So she must be pretty!"

The Little Lieutenant grinned delightedly.

"And will you please assure the Knight that I am not at all in love with you?" said the Princess.

"With me!" said the Little Lieutenant, open-

ing his eyes as widely as circumstances would permit.

"He's quite worrying about it," said the Princess, with a sympathetic glance at the Knight; and the Knight pretended an icy indifference.

"Good Lor'!" said the Little Lieutenant, and went off into a roar of laughter that woke up all the sea-gulls.

"It's all right, old chap," said he; "you needn't be jealous of me!"

"The Knight has not been jealous," said the Princess quickly. "He only worries because he's my cousin. Relations are always school-mistressy."

The Lieutenant grinned.

"I've a cousin myself," he said, with an intuitive sympathy which made the Knight's blood boil. "Oh, dear, I wish I wasn't going to-day!"

"So do I," said the Princess. "I've never seen your cousin, after all."

"But I've some rather ripping news," said the Little Lieutenant. "Her aunt knows your aunt."

"What!" said the Princess.

"She's a Mrs. Otholroyd Booth, and they're both on the Board of Trade, or something," said the Lieutenant. "So you can make friends through your aunts, if you will."

"Indeed I will," said the Princess. "Aunt is always trying to inveigle me into friendships with the nice girls that belong to the high-minded women she meets on her boards and committees, and Mrs. Otholroyd Booth is her dearest friend. Our friendship could not have been planned in more auspicious circumstances."

"And if you are chums, as I'm sure that you will

be," said the Little Lieutenant, "and I write to you, I might send messages?"

"You can send letters," said the immoral Princess.

"I couldn't quite do that," said the Little Lieutenant. "I might get you into a row, and you've been such a brick. But you can tell me heaps about her, can't you?"

"I don't mind risking the letters," said the Princess.

"But I do," said the Lieutenant gallantly. "As you say your aunt's such a Tartar——"

"This is my Aunt's son," said a crimson Princess, and the Little Lieutenant broke the lengthy silence that followed by saying he had a good deal of packing to do.

So the Lieutenant and the Princess bade each other a sympathetic but hopeful good-bye, the Knight bowed stiffly, and the Little Lieutenant ran down the hill and disappeared in the streets of Polcombe.

"Oh, I am glad to think I can help him!" said the Princess, forgetting everything except that the Little Lieutenant had gone for three years. "And the girl he loves lives with an aunt, poor dear! That's another bond of sympathy."

The Knight resumed his stone-throwing operations.

"You don't think it rather mean to get to know the girl through the mater, for the express purpose of helping her to deceive and disobey her aunt, who, after all, is the mater's friend?" asked the Knight.

"You are your mother's son in more ways than one," said the Princess pleasantly.

"There is no one whose son I would rather be!"

said the Knight, which, after all, was the only thing a loyal Knight could say.

"Naturally!" said the Princess, who had several little scores saved up against the Knight. "You have all your family's self-satisfaction."

"I merely wished to suggest that, while you are living under our roof," said the Knight.

"Which is through no fault of my own, but that of the idiots who look after me in Chancery," said the Princess.

"I am sorry you do not find us more congenial," said the Knight, with his teeth set and his hands in his pockets.

"You are awfully good to me," said the Princess, in a rush of penitence, and slipping a coaxing hand into the Knight's arm.

The Knight did not respond.

"While you have to support the infliction of my mother's society," he remarked, in a cool and sensible tone, and the Princess took her hand from his arm, "you might occasionally pause to think what she feels about your escapades."

"My what?" said the Princess, with faint interest.

"Escapades," said the Knight.

"I thought that was a word that was only used in books," said the Princess, with mild surprise. "You haven't by any chance been reading one, have you?"

"As I was saying, it would not be very pleasant for my mother if she heard how her niece had given herself away to a cad like that Mountebank," said the Knight, with cold contempt.

The Princess hummed an airy tune.

"Also if she finds out you're acting as go-between

for the niece of her dearest friend, and a little fool of a Lieutenant about whom you know absolutely nothing, and to whom you weren't even introduced," said the Knight, in a fine frenzy at the Princess's musical display.

The Princess laughed, and the Knight suppressed a desperate word.

"I was only thinking," said the Princess, daintily balancing her hat on the tips of her fingers. "What a festive time your wife will have, with you and her mother-in-law!"

Then the Knight rammed his hands in his pockets and strode on in silence, while the Princess gaily finished her song.

XI.

THE BLACK MONKEY.

A GAY and indifferent Princess sang as she climbed the stair; a suddenly serious Princess locked the door of her bedroom and sat down to think. The Princess's bedroom was small, and under the roof. Mournful frames of funeral cards adorned the bulging walls, and exhorting texts met the Princess's eye wherever she turned. A rich abundance of worsted mats and china ornaments lightened the effect of the old-fashioned furniture, and heavy albums sat with dignity upon the chest of drawers.

The Princess's toilet silver was crowded together in glistening ostentatiousness upon the little dressing-table, so modest in its petticoat of shiny pink, and the Princess's hats lay upon the chairs, and her frocks ruffled up upon the bed and behind the door and on the window seat.

The Princess's brow grew more and more clouded; her kingdom was beset with dangers which needed her most grave attention. "I must call a Council," said the Princess, so she cleared the chair that stood before the dressing-table and ensconced herself in state upon it. Then she pushed aside a great big cheeky powder-jar and tilted up the looking-glass, and set her elbows on the table, and rested her chin on her hands and looked at herself. And while she sat and looked,

busy little Conscience cried out loud and summoned the Princess's Council of State.

First came Reflection; then Prudence, Nice Feeling, Proper Pride, Maidenly Modesty, Honour, and Dignity bustled into place, and folded their fat little hands and smoothed their smug little faces. Then the Princess sat back on her throne, and the Council began. Love-of-Excitement and Love-of-Emotion of course were not admitted. Conscience had hit them so hard, they lay stunned on the mat outside.

"We might begin with the things you said to the Knight about his mother," said Nice Feeling. "Did you think them funny?"

"Call Repentance!" said Conscience gleefully, and in rushed Repentance with a stinging whip, and lashed and lashed the Princess till she wept.

"Oh, but that's nothing!" said Conscience zealously. "Now let Honour speak!" Then Conscience assisted Honour to rise, for Honour was a weakly, anæmic little thing, and terribly afraid of the devils on the mat.

"You should not have read the Prince's letter to the Artist," said Honour.

"Oh, we really must come in!" said the devils, and bang through the door came Love-of-Excitement and Love-of-Emotion, and perched on the arms of the Princess's chair like the spoilt little devils they were.

"Ooooh! Look at Honour puffing out his chest!" giggled Love-of-Excitement. "Why don't he cultivate a sense of humour?"

"What an over-rated little chap he is!" said Love-of-Emotion, snuggling up to the Princess lovingly.

"You promised me you wouldn't listen to the devils!" shrieked Conscience.

"No, I won't," said the Princess. "Be quiet, devils!" Then the devils looked at each other behind the Princess's back, and put their tongues in their cheeks.

"Listen to me," said Maidenly Modesty, and she was even more artificial and posing than Honour. "Don't you feel rather ashamed when you think of the way in which you flirted with the Prince?"

"Oh, do ask Maidenly Modesty to clear out!" said Love-of-Emotion. "She's such a beastly nuisance—so silly and affected!"

"Yes; what use can a mincing niminy-piminy like her be to a dashing Princess like you?" said Love-of-Excitement. "Chuck her out, there's a sensible Princess!"

"No, no, no! Every one was called, and every one shall be heard," said Conscience.

"Can't have any fun with her around," sulked the devils. "You never know when she'll pop out and sting, for all her mewling mild expression. Yah!"

But Conscience had Maidenly Modesty tight in hand. "I won't let you go," said Conscience. "You shall make the Princess more miserable than any of them."

"But what is all this about the Prince?" said Wisdom, to whom the Princess occasionally listened, though she seldom obeyed his dictates. "Isn't it foolish to write such unreserved letters to a man who falls in love with every other girl he sees?"

"Making yourself a little cheap, I think," said Self-Respect. "You cannot care to be classed with the hundreds who have responded only too readily to the Prince's advances."

"He is the sort of man who flirts with shop-girls,"

said Dignity. "You will feel very dignified when he grows tired of you."

"You'll be tired first," whispered Love-of-Emotion.

"Letters are concrete things and can be kept," said Prudence. "Have you ever seriously thought what you put in your letters to the Prince?"

"Quite sure you have not made an irredeemable fool of yourself?" said the Council all together in a disagreeable chorus.

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" suddenly shrieked out the devils. "There's Maidenly Modesty whispering to all of them! Come off the grass!" And into the midst of the Council frolicked the devils.

"Come in, Repentance!" cried Conscience, and Repentance ran in with the whip and tried to chase the little devils out; but they only laughed and made long noses, and snatched the whip, and smacked it at him, till he turned tail and fled, and left the little devils loose and shouting so loudly not another voice could be heard above the devil din.

"What do you care what the Prince thinks?" cried Love-of-Excitement. "You want to have fun!"

"But you do care what the Man in Uganda thinks!" cried the piercing voice of Self-Respect.

"Rot! he'd understand exactly," said Love-of-Excitement. "There's no real harm in your flirtations."

"Perfect nonsense, lugging him in! It isn't as if you'd promised him anything. Not so silly, I hope," said Love-of-Emotion.

"There's that abject letter you wrote the Prince," said Proper Pride.

"Perfectly sweet of you to write it," said Love-of-Emotion. "You'd hurt his feelings, and were sorry and begged his pardon. Quite right!"

"Besides, you only wrote to see what he'd say next," said Love-of-Excitement. "Think how interesting it was, waiting for his answers!"

"You promised not to listen to the devils," said Conscience, who was becoming rather harassed.

"Why do you let that missish old Conscience prate and bully?" said Love-of-Excitement. "Are you out on a quest, or tied to a black-board doing wool-work? That's all I want to know."

"Do you mean to live, or retire into a mummy case? I simply ask the question," said Love-of-Emotion.

"Wait!" said Maidenly Modesty, and rose with all her spiteful fingers spread out scratch-wise. "Think how you hinted and bragged to the Knight about the Little Lieutenant, when the Knight knew all the time the Lieutenant did not care a bit at all for you!"

"Shut up!" yelled the devils.

"The Knight's been pitying you for loving a man who didn't love you!" shrieked Maidenly Modesty, and seized her chance at last.

"Then it's like his cheek!" yelled the devils, and danced fandangos over Modesty. "If he were a true Knight he wouldn't think insulting things! He's an interfering, self-righteous son of his mother! Let him think what he jolly well likes! What do you care? What's the use of being hurt by Repentance? Why be made miserable by a pack of canting virtues? You're a Princess, ain't you, not a secretary to a Sunday-school? Chuck 'em out! Tell the Council

they can go to blazes. See us run among 'em and make 'em scatter!" yelled the devils, and sent off fireworks from the Princess's eyes, and kissed the Princess's cheeks till they flamed, and poked their fingers into all the dimples till they bubbled over with wickedness.

"How much more becoming we are than Repentance," said the devils. "Just look at yourself in the glass."

"The Council's dismissed," said the Princess, and the devils leapt up with a whoop and a yell.

Wisdom had departed some minutes ago, and now the devils tripped up Proper Pride, and died with laughter when they saw her sprawling; then they poked Dignity in the ribs till he was upset, and yelled at Sense till he was deafened; and as for trembling Honour and Maidenly Modesty and all those weakly little things, why, the devils knocked them down and quite extinguished them. Even Conscience could not speak, for the devils caught him in the chest and he doubled up as weak as putty; and the Princess was best pleased of all when Conscience's persistent voice no longer pricked and teased.

"Now we'll go on the spree!" cried the devils. "Now we'll show the silly folks who lecture you how much you care for them. You're a match for all of them when you've got us, now ain't you?"

And the Princess laughed delightedly to the naughty pretty devils who grinned out of her eyes.

"What shall I do?" said the Princess.

"Oh, let's go on a bust!" said Love-of-Excitement, whose high spirits often made him vulgar. "Make a move from here."

"Yes; you've exhausted this place," said Love-of-

Emotion. "The Lieutenant's gone, and you'll have no more adventures, with the Knight to guard you. Life might be a prison-house instead of a fair, the way he looks at it."

"Besides, the Artist and the Housewife are in league with the Knight," said the artful, silky Love-of-Emotion. "They're all against you. You haven't a single pal of your own."

"Show 'em you're independent of 'em," said Love-of-Excitement, preparing for his *coup d'état*. "Go off by the mail to-night!"

"Oh, but I couldn't," said the Princess.

"You'd arrive in town at half-past eight to-morrow morning," said Love-of-Excitement. "You could go straight to your club and have breakfast; then wire to the Prince to come up to town and lunch with you. You haven't seen the Prince since your quarrel. Think how exciting it will be to see what he'll say!"

"And the Poet's in town, and the Queen's coming back for this week," whispered Love-of-Emotion. "And town's so nice in August. The restaurants are so cool and empty, and it's charming at night in a hansom."

"And there's the Slave," said Love-of-Excitement. "You might do a theatre and supper with him. Your Aunt's safe in Cookham, and no one would know."

But the Princess looked slightly uninterested, and Love-of-Excitement hastily dropped the Slave.

"I only mentioned the Slave if you had an odd hour to fill in," said Love-of-Excitement. "It's convenient to know he's there."

"And it would be such fun to go away from here in such a hurry," said Love-of-Emotion. "It would

pay them out nicely for being so hateful to you. They're probably talking you over now. Listen how they're all laughing downstairs! I expect the Knight is telling how you talked to him about the Little Lieutenant. Poor dear! It is a shame for them to laugh at you!"

"Stupid idiots!" said Love-of-Excitement. "Jolly dull lives they have. How dare they criticise you and try and manage you!"

"If the Knight really cared for you, he wouldn't always take his mother's side," said Love-of-Excitement, bringing out a dripping handkerchief. "You poor little Princess, you're all alone in your kingdom. You're not really important or necessary to anyone in the world." And Love-of-Emotion spoke so touchingly that the Princess wept for sheer sympathy.

"Don't cry, you duffer!" said Love-of-Excitement, when the Princess had tearfully sobbed for a minute or two. "Go off by the mail train to spite them!"

"The Knight will come too," said the Princess. "He never will let me travel alone."

"Horrid policeman Knight!" said Love-of-Emotion. "Oh, how they do ill-use and coerce you!"

"But there's a way of breaking free from his officiousness. How about the Black Monkey?" whispered Love-of-Emotion, oh so gently and artfully.

"No, no, no!" said the Princess, with enormous firmness. "I never am going to have a Black Monkey again! He won't go when I'm tired of him, and he makes me hateful to everyone!"

"He's a great protection when people are trampling on you," said Love-of-Excitement.

"Dear little Black Monkey," said Love-of-Emotion; "he's such a companion!"

"You are so interesting when you have the little Black Monkey on your shoulder," said Love-of-Excitement. "You do such reckless, dashing things. He always leads you into adventures."

"And you can make people so miserable when your Monkey's up," whispered Love-of-Emotion. "It would be rather nice to punish the Knight for having misjudged you so impudently. And the Artist and the Housewife want a bit of a lesson for thinking cheeky patronising things about you. Oh, do have that dear little pet of a Monkey!"

"No, no!" said the Princess, and began to collect her frocks in a heap.

"Then how are you going to get away?" said the devils, hurrying about the room after the Princess, as she threw her hats and frocks into her trunk under an impression she was packing.

"Be quiet!" said the Princess. "I'm not going to have a Black Monkey," and she jammed hat-pins into a pin-cushion in a firm and decided manner.

"Oh, well, then you can't go, that's all," said the devils, and suddenly loosed hold of the Princess and sat down on the trunk. "It's no use packing. You can't get out of this place without him!"

"No, the Knight won't let you go alone, never in this world," said Love-of-Emotion, swinging its feet carelessly as it balanced itself on the edge of the trunk. "He'll pack you in his travelling rug and carry you straight home to Cookham. No staying in town at your club!"

"No, indeed! You'll arrive home in time for

lunch with your Aunt. How exciting!" said Love-of-Excitement, with a languid yawn.

"Most thrilling!" said Love-of-Emotion, closing its eyes. "Chops and rice pudding, and the latest news about the Education Bill. Why aren't you hurrying with your packing?"

"The Queen hates Black Monkeys," said the Princess. "I promised her I'd never have one again. I won't! I won't!"

"The Queen! Oh, the Queen!" said Love-of-Excitement. "Oh, of course, if the Queen doesn't want you to have a Black Monkey, that's different! Of course the Queen must be obeyed! Why don't you take off that crown and set a boot-scraper on your head?"

"I don't obey the Queen! I don't obey anyone!" said the Princess fiercely.

"That's a good job, as she never thinks of your existence when you're out of her sight," said Love-of-Emotion. "Don't flatter yourself the Queen really cares for anyone except the Poet and the Jester. You're quite alone in the world, my dear!"

"Cry baby! Coward! Skulking hypocrite!" yelled the devils. "What's the use of being a Princess if you can't have a little Black Monkey when you feel like it?"

"Oh! The Monkey can come!" cried the Princess, quite tired out, and threw in all the silver loose among her frocks.

"Here he is waiting, all ready for you, love," gabbled Love-of-Excitement.

"Come along, you pretty little pet," cried Love-of-Emotion. "Oh, isn't he a pretty pet? Up you

jump, ducky! Take care of your mistress, won't you?"

And the little black devils squeeze each other's hands ecstatically, for on the Princess's shoulder they had hoisted the Black Monkey. There he sat with his little black paws crossed one on the other, his evil little face grinning against the Princess's, his wicked little tongue whispering naughty sulky thoughts into the Princess's receptive ear. He patted her face, and cross lines came on it as if by magic. He blew in her eyes, and all the light and sunshine died out of them. He stroked her mouth, and it lost its smile at once and pouted sullenly. He smoothed her hair, and it no longer curled. Then the Black Monkey looked down on the devils and solemnly winked, and they squeeze each other's hands again and nearly choked with laughter.

"We can lie down for a bit now," said Love-of-Emotion to the Princess. "You're all right now, ain't you, ducky?"

"Yes, we'd better give her a rest; there'll be plenty to do in a very little time," said Love-of-Excitement. "Good-bye, Monkey. Don't you topple down, now! Sit still!"

"Ta ta, Princess! Ta ta, Monkey!" said Love-of-Emotion, and made a long nose at the Monkey behind the Princess's back.

Then the two little devils caught hold of each other and valsed round the room, and plumped down all breathless with laughter right in the midst of the bed.

"Rather cleverly worked?" said Love-of-Excitement.

"I fancy I did the trick," said Love-of-Emotion,

and the two little devils lay flat on their backs and kicked up their heels in rapturous mirth.

"How she obeys us!" chuckled Love-of-Excitement. "She's like putty in our hands, ain't she?" "it funny?" gasped Love-of-Emotion, quite speechless.

"Oh, lor'! and she thinks we're her slaves. Ain't Then the two little devils hid their faces in the pillow and pulled the sheets over their heads, and choked and spluttered and gasped with mirth, till they laughed themselves asleep from sheer exhaustion.

"Wake up!" whispered the Black Monkey. "She's going downstairs, and she wants you."

So Love-of-Emotion woke up. Then Love-of-Emotion gave a hasty choke, and stuffed the sheet into its mouth and gurgled rapturously. "You clever little pet! You have worked well!" it said, as it saw the Princess's changed appearance.

"Anything the matter?" said Love-of-Excitement sleepily.

"No, you lie still for a bit," said Love-of-Emotion. "You'll be wanted when the Princess sets out on her journey." So Love-of-Excitement turned over and went to sleep again, and Love-of-Emotion jumped into the Princess's heart and began to stroke it.

"Come downstairs and show them how superior you are to their unkindness, now," said Love-of-Emotion tenderly.

"Show 'em how you hate 'em," jeered the Monkey. "Loose me at their stupid grinning faces! They won't laugh long when I'm about!"

"You might even get their Monkeys up," said Love-of-Emotion. "Then there would be a row!" and Love-of-Excitement stirred in the bed.

"No, it's much better fun to make 'em miserable," said the Black Monkey, who felt he lost importance when other people's Monkeys rose.

Then the Monkey hid himself snugly behind the bow on the Princess's hair, Love-of-Emotion turned up the whites of its eyes and tried to make itself look as much like Proper Pride as possible, and the Princess pinned on her most unbecoming hat at the most unbecoming angle, and threw her travelling coat all ready on to the bed, and tilted her chin and opened the door of her room.

"Now remember, I don't want them to see you on any account," said the Princess, for the Monkey kicked his feet out when he heard the laughing voices in the sitting-room.

"Of course not," said the Monkey humbly. "I'm safely hidden, ducky; trust me!"

"Tea's ready!" said the Housewife, coming out to the foot of the stair. "Oh, there you are! What *have* you been doing all the afternoon?"

"Nothing!" said the Princess shortly, and the naughty Monkey thrust its ugly head out and made disgusting faces at the Housewife.

"You're not letting her see you?" said the Princess distrustfully, for the Housewife was looking at her in a startled way.

"No, dear," said the Monkey, pulling bacon at the Housewife; "most certainly not!" And he stood out on the Princess's shoulder and kicked his toes in the air. "Hasn't the faintest idea that I'm here!" And he turned a back somersault into the Princess's eyes and played about on the Princess's face. "In fact, she wouldn't believe I was here if you told her!" And the Monkey sat down on the

top of the Princess's hat and scowled in full sight of the world.

But as there was no looking-glass at hand, the Princess imagined she looked dignified as she stalked into the sitting-room, though all the time the Monkey was giving her such a ridiculous appearance that the Artist turned round to the window with an odd little gasp, and the Housewife laughed outright.

"Now what's the matter?" said the Housewife, making tea good-naturedly.

"The Little Lieutenant has gone," said the Artist, who rather liked to tease the Princess.

"We said there must be some reason to make you so quiet," said the Housewife, alluding to a little joke that the Princess was fond of talking.

"They have been discussing you, just as I said," murmured Love-of-Emotion carelessly.

"Let me loose!" said the Black Monkey, quivering with passion.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said the Princess, who felt she hated everyone, including the Black Monkey.

"Leave her to me," said Love-of-Emotion aside to the Monkey. "You'll have a much longer innings if you'll only wait and let me work her up a bit!" So the Monkey remained still and made hideous faces.

"I'm afraid I'm the cause," said the Knight to the Housewife, as he took his seat beside the Princess with a tactless smile. "We had a bit of a quarrel, didn't we?" And the Knight tried to keep from laughing as the Monkey tottered on its perch and nearly tumbled over at the sound of the Knight's friendly voice.

"He's laughing at me!" squealed the Monkey,

recovering his footing at a bound. "Let me go for him, the brute!"

"It will be all over in half a minute if you do," said Love-of-Emotion savagely, and the Monkey shut his mouth with difficulty.

"Still silent?" said the Artist, with a fatherly twinkle, as he passed the Princess her favourite scones.

"The world must be coming to an end," said the Housewife, with dear little good-tempered dimples dancing in her face and sweet imps of humour playing peep-bo in her eyes.

"No wonder the Artist and the Knight are both on her side," moaned Love-of-Emotion. "See how pretty she is, with that charming Irish smile. And how womanly and cosey she looks at the head of the table, with the sunlight shining on her hair. The Knight can't take his eyes off her, and the Artist looks as stupidly adoring as if she were a picture. No one's looking at you," said Love-of-Emotion. "Don't have any scones!"

So the Princess coldly refused her favourite scones.

"The scones have done nothing," said the Artist, who was tickled at the Monkey's funny ways, and rather liked to watch him prank about.

"Oh, don't be silly, Princess," said the Housewife across the table. "Cheer up, there's a dear!"

"I'm falling! I'm falling!" said the Monkey, grasping at the Princess with tiny feeble fingers.

"She was laughing at you upstairs. Is that the act of a pal?" gasped Love-of-Emotion.

"It *will* be slow without the Little Lieutenant dropping in," said the Housewife, in a friendly under-

standing way. The Housewife could manage the Princess exactly, if mere man had allowed her.

"I'm going!" cried the Monkey, oh so faint and weak.

"Do you think you will be able to support life without him, Princess?" said the Knight, blundering in where one's dearest chum alone may tread.

"Ha, ha! Here I am!" cried the little Black Monkey, and sat firm on the Princess once more. "I think we're all right now!" said the little Black Monkey, and Love-of-Emotion hugged itself with glee.

"Why have you put your hat on, kiddy?" said the Housewife quickly.

"To give us the pleasure of seeing a creation," said the Artist, as stupidly ignorant as the Knight of the fact that only dearest girl chums may conquer Princess's Black Monkeys.

"It is the ugliest hat you have, and you put it on on purpose to spite them," murmured the Monkey. "The Artist is making a fool of you, dear; humouring you because he looks upon you as a silly child. Notice how the Knight is eating all your favourite scones. Why, there won't be one left in a minute!"

"These scones are ripping. Do have one!" said the Knight.

"Ooooooh!!! Let me out!!!" screamed the Monkey.

"Yes, do," said Love-of-Emotion. "I've tried to keep him back, but when it comes to the Knight offering you a scone as if nothing were the matter——" And into the room flew the little Black Monkey.

"No, thanks," said the Princess, with an absent

smile; and the Black Monkey opened his tool-chest and pulled out his pins of indifference. "I'm not hungry," said the Princess, as her gaze wandered abstractedly out of the window, and the Monkey hummed a cheerful song as he hammered the pins in the Knight.

"What a fool you look
Eating up the scones,
And generally displaying
A healthy appetite!"

(The Monkey was much too busy to pause for rhymes.)

"Notice how the Princess
Is staring out!
She has evidently forgotten
Your existence!"

sang the Monkey to the Knight, and smacked the last pin on the head with gusto.

"Lisbeth dear, you won't think me horrid, will you? but I'm thinking of going up to town by the mail to-night," said the Princess, carelessly bringing her eyes back from the window.

"To-night!" said the Artist.

"Whatever for?" said the Housewife.

"You can't go to-night, of course!" said the Knight, in a voice that resembled his mother's.

"No?" said the Princess, concentrating her gaze on the Knight with earnest attention, while the Monkey gulped with excitement as he laid his paw on the mallet of ridicule. "Are you going to prevent me?" said the Princess politely, and the Monkey brought down the mallet precisely.

"Of course you're not going," said the Knight,

and felt a dull ache as the heavy strokes of the mallet descended again.

"How are you going to keep me here?" said the Princess, with daintily questioning eyebrows. "By force?"

The Knight was silent.

"Or are you relying on the force of attraction your presence has for me?" said the Princess, with an airy smile, and the mallet came down whack on the Knight's sore heart.

"Oh, don't be silly and quarrel," said the Housewife soothingly. "Of course you're not going to leave us like this—unless you're tired of us. I expect you find us pretty slow after London."

"Slow!" said the Princess's real self, in a sudden fire of indignation. "Tired of the chums whose lives are built in with yours, with whom you've spent the happiest hours of your life; the chums who understand you and appreciate you just as you understand and sympathise with them! Tired of them! Tired of them!"

"Yes, and a lot they cared for you!" said Love-of-Emotion, bringing out the dripping handkerchief. "You used to be first with Lisbeth, but that's long ago; the Artist has taken her from you. Fond of the Artist, are you? Glad they're both so happy? Glad if you helped at all in bringing them together? Well, you are a cringing little door-mat. Quite a craze for playing second fiddle lately. Where's that boot-scraper we spoke of?"

"Why don't you help me?" said the Princess to the Monkey fiercely. "Go on fighting! Hurt the Artist and the Housewife, can't you?" And the Monkey chuckled as he picked out the screw of bore-

dom and chose the screw-driver of superiority for his weapon.

"One always exhausts a place and people," said the Princess, in a tired voice. "I've stayed here three weeks, after all. I'm really awfully sorry, but if I woke up here another morning, I should have hysterics!"

"I'm sorry we don't entertain you," said the Artist humbly.

"Oh, let her go if she wants to," said the Housewife, for the Monkey was twisting the cruel screw right down into the friendship she had shared so long with the Princess.

"I shall have to come with you, of course," said the Knight brusquely; the screw had penetrated farthest into his heart after all.

"My *dear* Knight!" said the Princess, and paused unspeakably, while the Monkey weighed and handled the largest spike of Cruelty in his tool-chest.

"My *dear* Knight!" said the Princess again, and the Monkey held high in the air the thin and shining steel. "I don't want to be horrid or rude, but if you knew the frantic way in which you have got on to my nerves these last few days, even you would spare me the infliction of your mother's axioms and your own respectable self, even if it means me travelling to London alone, where, by the bye, I have made several engagements for the next two or three days," said the Princess; and the Monkey turned the steel round and round in the heart of the wounded Knight.

Then a sudden silence fell on the little room, and the Black Monkey cast his clinging arms round the Princess, and pressed himself against her face until he

almost suffocated her, and sang out loud his evil noisy song:

“ I think you have scored,
Decidedly scored!
Now he'll leave you alone !
It will teach him to pity
A Princess again !
Oh, how like his mother
He looks at this moment !
The Artist and Housewife
Pity him naturally,
Because, as you know,
They are on the Knight's side ! ”

“ Oh, have mercy ! ” cried Kindness.

“ Bah ! ” cried the Monkey, and kicked Kindness right into the middle of next week.

“ Don't, don't ! ” said the Artist under his breath, as the Princess laughed, for the Artist had the tenderest heart in the world.

“ Oh, it's no use speaking to her when she has the Monkey with her,” said the Housewife, with a flash of scorn in her glorious eyes.

“ Oh, let's get out of this ! ” said the Monkey, for the Princess never enjoyed his company in the presence of people to whom he had betrayed himself.

So the Princess went upstairs, and Love-of-Excitement woke up, and off they all went to catch the mail train at Udy, Love-of-Emotion and Love-of-Excitement and the Princess, all in charge of the little Black Monkey. And the Artist and the Housewife and the Knight stood at the gate and watched the sulky little party drive away, and, alas for the conceit of Princesses ! heaved a unanimous and truly thankful sigh.

XII.

THE FALSE PRINCE.

ALL through the night the Monkey sat on the Princess's shoulder in the jolting, lumbering, headachy train. Love-of-Excitement and Love-of-Emotion had danced and shouted so uproariously to feel that they were really off, that in a little while the Princess was quite tired out, and lay back against her cushions and felt she would give anything to go to sleep. But the Monkey's hot little paws were pressing down upon her brain, and Love-of-Excitement and Love-of-Emotion sent pricking shivers through her heart whenever she tried to close her eyes and forget their presence. So it was a very weary Princess who alighted at the station in London.

But it was such a glorious summer morning that the Princess revived a little when she found herself driving through the streets to her club. Love-of-Excitement woke up now, and mounted to the door of the hansom, and dangled his agile little legs over the edge and rubbed his hands at the sights and sounds of the busy streets, so fresh and tidy in the early morning, and yet so full of hurrying people and signs of life. Then Love-of-Emotion woke up too, and hung stars in the Princess's eye, and rubbed the Princess's cheeks till they were pink again, and stroked the aching forehead, and curled the Princess's hair, and

generally made her fit and ready for the eventful day that was to come.

"Oh, won't it be nice to see the Prince?" whispered Love-of-Emotion. "Princes are much more attractive than Knights. What an interesting conversation you will have with him!"

Then the Princess descended at the door of her club, and the Monkey began to make his dear little presence felt again.

"Oooh! What a stuffy little place!" said the Monkey, jumping on to the Princess's head as she went down in the lift. "Oooh! My goodness! What a horrid greasy hot smell of cooking!"

The Princess was now knocking at the kitchen door, so it was not wholly surprising that there should be a smell of cooking just about there. Then the maid said "In the dining-room," and the Princess went into the dining-room in search of the house-keeper.

"A dining-room, did you say?" said the Monkey, gazing about him with great surprise. "I should have called it a workhouse ward without the airiness. I should run and pay your guinea to the fish-shop at the corner, dear, and ask them to let you have lunch in *their* cellar. You would have *that* to yourself!"

"I'm not going to let you spoil my day for me, so you needn't think it," said the Princess, but the Monkey's shrill little voice was not to be stilled so easily as that.

"Darling, is that a menu that she's showing you?" chirped the horrid caustic Monkey. "Why, there's nothing on the list a self-respecting cat would eat. Soup? Dish-water, dear! They're kidding you! Pigeon pie! Pigeons? 'Scuse me laughing, pet, but

did she say pigeons or sparrows? Wine? *Les Deux Frères!* My precious girl, are they pretending that's a brand? You know how much men think of what they eat and drink. I'm sure I hope the Prince will enjoy the really excellent lunch your club's providing." And the little Black Monkey covered his eyes with his hand, and pretended a sudden faintness at the sight of the menu the Princess and the housekeeper had chosen.

"Oh, do be quiet! I know I am not good at lunches," said the Princess imploringly. "But I've had people to dinner here that quite enjoyed themselves."

"Dinners, yes!" said the Monkey charmingly. "But lunches are rather scrappy meals here, ain't they? Ghostly dinners, resurrection business. What? Sure it wouldn't have been much wiser to send a message to the housekeeper last night to tell her you had someone coming? No? No time now, of course. Never mind! I hope you'll both enjoy it."

It was at this moment the Princess began to discover the Monkey a nuisance.

"I'll write letters till the Prince comes," said the Princess angrily.

"Do," said the Monkey, following her all the time. "You owe the Quiet Man a letter. Rather fun to talk about the Prince to him. You've never mentioned him as yet, have you? You might suggest your fondness for the Prince; let it slip out unconsciously, and see what the Quiet Man will say. It will give him something to think of in Uganda."

So the Princess wrote to the Man in Uganda, and mentioned the Prince was coming to lunch.

"I have great news for you. The Prince has

come into my kingdom and taken it by storm,' " wrote the wise Princess. " 'He is the only man in the world who has ever understood me, and whom I am able to talk to. He feels the same to me. He is the handsomest man I know. I don't expect I shall ever write to you again, as of course all my letters must be kept for him now.' "

Then the Princess directed this sensible letter, and took it at once to the post, where it caught the mail for Uganda. And then the Princess came back into the room, and found the Prince had arrived.

"Hullo!" said the Prince, quite alarmingly boyish in his frock coat and embarrassment.

"What a perfectly silly look a tiny moustache gives to a big man's face! And what a vacillating expression that twinkle gives his eyes! My dear girl, how could you?" said the Monkey.

"Hullo!" said the Princess coldly. "You're extremely late!"

"Late!" said the Prince, in mild stupefaction. "Why, the clock's just striking!"

The Princess went rather pink, and led the way to the dining-room silently.

"That was a silly thing to say," said the Monkey, hopping along after the Princess. "Now he'll think you've been pining for him to come. Do, for goodness sake, let him see exactly how you're feeling. I hate hypocrisy."

Then the Monkey jumped up on the Princess's shoulder and made a rude face at the Prince, while the Princess shook out her table-napkin in a bored manner and gazed at the Prince intently.

"I do hate your moustache," said the Princess, putting her guest at once at ease, as a hostess should.

"It isn't exactly that it's effeminate, although it gives that sissy look I so despise; it's more futile. Isn't there anything men use to make moustaches grow? I don't mean to be rude," said the Princess, with frowning eyes, and still surveying the happy and easy Prince, "but I can't help looking at it. It's the only thing I see."

The Princess thoughtfully laid her napkin in her lap, then turned away with a sudden start of resolution. "If you talk, perhaps that will keep me from looking at you," said the Princess, "and make me think of something else. I didn't know it was as small as that. I must have forgotten."

"You seem to have forgotten a good many things," said a smarting Prince.

"What disgusting soup!" said the dear little pet of a Monkey. "I was mistaken in calling it dish-water, dear. Dish-water is both nutritious and tasty. And what, darling, what are the little objects in it? The little white things? Don't tell me in detail, because I'm rather shaken about with so much travelling. No, dear, it's *not* macaroni; but let's forget it. I only wish the Prince would. How curiously he's looking at it. One teaspoonful seems to have been sufficient for him."

"Oh, be quiet!" said a desperate, humiliated Princess.

"What have you been doing with yourself since I last saw you?" said a languid smiling Hostess to her guest.

"Oh, I dunno. Tell me about yourself," said the Prince, politely declining the onus of the conversation.

"Yes, do," said the Monkey. "Now's your

chance to explain how little you've missed him. It's the truth, and so he ought to know it; and I shouldn't trouble to wrap it up at all. If a man with a moustache like that has feelings, they're not worth considering. Chuck it at him!" said the Monkey.

"Oh, I've been killing time," said the Princess, with good-natured patronage. "Let me see! What *have* I been doing? Meeting a lot of new people," here the Princess suppressed a yawn, "whom you don't know," said the Princess, calling to the maid for some bread which she did not require. "Just having fun, as usual," said the Princess, with reminiscent smiles.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said the Prince, with the air of an offensive elder brother. "I don't like you when you're frivolous."

"Well, of all the cheek!" said a gasping Monkey, so startled he forgot his attitude of bitter criticism. "Of all the dashed cheek!" gasped the profane Monkey. "Tell him to go and be——" And the Monkey poured out such an excellent flow of bad language, that for the first time in her life the Princess regretted she was a girl, and so could not use it.

"I'm afraid I don't very much care when you like me," said the Princess, trying to look pleasant. "The only person's opinion that matters to me is my own; and as I'm awfully fond of myself when I'm frivolous, that's all I think of!"

"You *have* improved!" said the Prince, with crushing sarcasm.

"I'm so glad you think so," said the Princess, with such a very successful innocent smile that the disgustingly literal Prince failed to appreciate its crush-

ing ridicule, and replied with slight contempt, "I didn't *mean* improved, you know."

"I should take a knife to him," gasped the Monkey. "There's one on your plate. Use it!"

"Don't be silly!" said the Princess. "The only dignified course of action to pursue is to show him I don't mind."

"Dignified!" said the Monkey. "Darling, *do* you think you can sustain any dignity when you're giving a man a lunch like this? And at your club, ducky? Your club's almost the same as your house. Go on chatting and smiling, darling; so brave of you! But don't delude yourself into imagining you can keep up your dignity."

"Do you hear me? Be quiet!" said the poor Princess, who was only just able to wink back the tears from her eyes; it was such an unroyal dilemma.

"I really want to know what you've been doing," said the Princess, vainly trying now to infuse a touch of friendliness into the atmosphere.

"Oh, lots of things," said the False Prince, who was also now prepared to speak the truth. "Being a tame cat, principally."

Love-of-Emotion stretched itself, but turned again and slumbered. The Prince's moustache, on top of that long, long midnight journey, had made it too tired.

"A tame cat? Oh, to some girl. How interesting!" said the Princess, rather astonished herself at Love-of-Emotion's silence. "Anything else?"

"Oh, I've been with quite a different set of people from those we knew at Cookham," said the Prince, and his tone conveyed a careless intimacy with most

of the crowned heads of Europe. "There's no chance that you'd know any of them."

"Oh!" said the Princess absently. She was gazing in an agonised manner on the Prince, as he carefully sorted out the pigeon bones in his pie and laid them in a neat heap opposite an equally neat erection of the pastry, both heaps of which, I must say for his honour as a Prince, he preserved inviolate. For the honour of the club, I must also say his gaze was fixed upon his plate with an intensity that would have suggested mental abstraction to anyone but a humiliated hostess.

"Did I say sparrows?" murmured the Monkey. "Positively you must have fixed on all the particular things the Prince dislikes. Why didn't you let him choose his lunch himself from the menu card? I wouldn't ask anyone to lunch again, dear. No. His wine is quite untasted. The Slave said it was good? Darling, the Slave's taste in wines is as uncertain as his veracity when he dines with you. Now, the Prince's judgment at this moment I should say has never been more unbiassed. Chat away, dear. I like to hear you prattle, and I only wish the Prince did."

"Oh, dear," said a desperate Princess. "I beg your pardon. What's that you're saying? A lot of new people know you? How nice!"

"Did you get any letters of mine?" said the Prince suddenly, with two expressive eyes uplifted to the Princess.

"Quite nice eyes, after all," said the Monkey. "But how astonishingly clearly he sees you with them now. Rather worse than magnifying glasses. No, dear, he *does not* think you pretty. He is admiring you precisely as much as you are admiring him."

"Letters?" said a sore and miserable Princess. "Oh, yes, I believe I did have three or four. I forget what was in them; nothing that wanted answering, I hope. I didn't read them very carefully. They looked to me to be all about yourself, as usual."

"Am I really so beastly egotistic?" said the Prince.

"Rather!" said the Princess, with her first tinge of joy since their meeting, and fondly hoping she was hurting. "I never met such a lost-to-all-sense-of-proportion egotist in my life!"

"I must try and check myself, then," said the Prince, looking out of the window in serious reminiscence. "You see, I'm a tame cat now, and it annoys someone."

"Oh, you mustn't do that, must you?" the Princess heard herself saying, as in a dream; the Prince was refusing salad.

"My hat! what a lunch!" said the Monkey, faint with laughter.

"I shall cry in a minute," said the Princess desperately.

"Yes, do cry," said the Monkey. "Then the Prince will think you're crying because he's a tame cat to—someone. He was once a tame cat to you."

"Yes, I don't know what you're talking of," agreed the Princess blindly, "but I must keep talking."

"I—I believe I met a friend of yours the other day," said the Princess. "The Silly Poet—I mean the Mountebank. Didn't you tell me once you knew him?"

"I used to know him," said the Prince. "I don't now."

"Don't you?" said the Princess. "I should have thought he would have been rather the sort of man you would be friends with. You have many of his little ways yourself. In fact, now I come to look at you and think of you, you're rather like a Mountebank altogether!"

If there is one insult that can wither up, sting, mortify, and utterly destroy a dashing young officer, it is to mention in a light and careless but convincing tone that he is like a Mountebank.

"I saw a letter from him the other day about you," said a white-faced Prince, to whom boiling oil would have been a feeble and ineffective weapon at the moment.

"About me?" said the Princess, with a sudden sick sensation at her heart.

"Do you want to know what he said?" asked a hard and merciless Prince.

"No, thanks, not at all. I'm not the least curious," said the Princess, with a frenzied rush. "I don't want to hear. I won't hear. If I hear, I shan't forget; and if I don't, I may. You're not to say it."

"He's been an awful cad to someone else I know," said a slightly remorseful Prince.

"I really don't care what your friend the Mountebank has said or done to you or any friends of yours," said the Princess. "As I tell you, the only person that is important or interesting to me is myself."

The Prince lifted his glass to his lips in an unthinking moment, and hurriedly set it down again.

"See that?" said the Monkey.

"I don't care a button what he doesn't drink!" said a maddened hostess.

"I'm afraid you don't like me very much to-day," said a reeling Princess, with a distracted smile.

The Prince maintained his silence, which was shared by the crowded room.

"My goodness gracious!" said the Monkey, with a squeal of joyous glee. "My darling girl! every single person of all these worthy clever young women in this room has heard every word of your conversation."

"Oh, well, if they have?" said a desperate Princess.

"Nothing, darling. Of course you've come out of it splendidly," said the Monkey. "They weren't listening to your first remarks on the Prince's personal appearance, so they'll see no reason for his curious behaviour to you as your guest. I wonder why they think he's lunching with you? They all can see how he's enjoying it. Well, of course, as I said, they've heard every word he's spoken. You know what a nice clear voice he has. Don't keep my news to yourself, dear. Share it with your friend."

"Everyone's heard every single word we've said," said the Princess to the Prince, and of course at that moment the room began to hum with conversation, and this defiant remark was lost upon the quondam listeners.

The Prince maintained his chastened silence.

"Not that I care a pin," said the Princess. "Of course, I'm a Princess."

"A Princess?" said the Prince, with a hint of a question.

"Certainly," said the Princess, fully roused. "And, by the way, I have no further use for you in my kingdom. I keep people in boxes, you see," ex-

plained the Princess modestly. "When I've done with them, I put them back in their boxes and throw them outside!"

"Supposing the people refused to go into the box to start with?" said the Prince. "Supposing they never had wanted to come into your kingdom, or being in, found it not at all interesting, and simply walked out?"

"I can do without them," said a gasping Princess.

"You don't mind if the people laugh at you," said the False Prince, and dropped his princely cloak and stood revealed as no true Prince, but a merely-wounded-vain-young-man.

"Not the least in the world," said the Princess mechanically.

"Hurt him!" gasped the Monkey, and dropped stunned from her shoulder.

"This is real, this is earnest," said some long-forgotten Silly Poet in the Princess's surging brain. Real! real! real! The Monkey and the devils were only made-up shadows, who could be no help to her. The Prince was only a False Prince, and the Princess was only a more than usually foolish Ordinary Girl.

"No, no, no!" said the Princess, with sudden passion in her. "A False Prince shan't take my kingdom from me! I'm a real Princess, even if Mountebanks and False Princes laugh at me!"

"I don't mind the least in the world," said the Princess, so cheerfully she even deceived the Prince. "Shall we go into the drawing-room?"

"I have to be at the Cecil at two-fifteen," said the Prince. "I can only stay ten minutes longer."

"Must you really go so soon?" said the foolish Princess, attempting a look of regret. If she had

been a wise Princess in full possession of her senses, she would have dismissed the False Prince there and then, the second his cloak had fallen. But the Princess was still so dizzy with the shock that her understanding was as stunned as the devils'.

So the Prince and the Princess returned to the reception room, and sat on the lounge and watched the clock tick forward, and all the time the Princess maintained a regretful expression on her face.

"Whatever happens, he mustn't know I attach any importance to his opinion," said the Princess to herself. "Or that I care in the least what he thinks about me. Or, indeed, have noticed anything he's said at all."

"'Fraid I must say good-bye," said the Prince. "When am I going to see you again?"

The Princess was so astonished that speech deserted her.

"I want to see you soon," said the Prince, "where we can have a good long talk."

The Princess felt dimly she must be demented, or else the Prince was babbling in his sleep.

"Couldn't you dine with me somewhere?" said the Prince.

"Dine with you?" said the Princess, and if a boa-constrictor had stood on its tail and beckoned her into its cage, her refusal could not have been more emphatic.

"No, thank you!" said the Princess.

"Well, lunch, then," said the Prince, standing up and looking very tall and very handsome in a dashing soldierly way. The Princess was forced to admit his really excellent appearance in the midst of her blinding wrath.

"Do come and lunch some day!" said the Prince.
"We'll go wherever you like."

"Why on earth should I lunch with you?" said the Princess, in speechless stupefaction, as one who would say, "Hasn't *this* been enough?"

"Oh, I dunno! It's simply an excuse to talk," said the Prince awkwardly. "I've such millions of things I want to talk about. Do say that you'll come!"

The Princess forgot she was a hostess; her overwrought feelings had made her merely human.

"I should like you to know," said the Princess, with a smile of horrible intensity, "that there is nothing on this earth that could induce me to lunch with you, or dine with you, or ever willingly *see* you again! I have simply done with you. You do not exist!"

"Oh, all right!" said a distinctly hurt Prince.
"Good-bye!" and he held out his hand.

"Good-bye!" said the Prince again.

The Princess gazed around the room.

"Aren't you going to shake hands?" said the Prince.

"No!" said the Princess bluntly.

Six feet and several inches of indecision remained in front of the lounge with a manly hand extended.

Interested ladies gazed at the performance from over the tops of newspapers, and wondered if there were a time limit. Others, more modest, looked down upon their magazines and blushed.

"Shake hands with a chap," said the Prince, looking really very nice and boyish.

"Everyone is laughing at you. You look so silly," said an unappreciative Princess, and the Prince

caught up his hat and stick and suddenly left the room.

"You knocked the bell that time, I fancy, darling," said the Monkey, with a muffled giggle, and the Princess found he had awakened.

"Oh, dear, I'm getting so tired of you!" said the Princess.

"Poor darling, what a shame!" said a silky voice, and the Princess felt soft little claws stroking her wounded heart. "Oh, I would write and tell the False Prince all you think of him. Here's a nice desk all ready, and plenty of paper. Now tell him *all* you feel!"

"Oh, more than that!" said Love-of-Excitement, with slight contempt for his moderate friend. "Write a raging letter. I'll help you!" and Love-of-Excitement dangled his legs in the ink-pot and kicked over the Princess's paper.

"Say you'll show him you're a real Princess some day," said Love-of-Emotion, as it swung on the Princess's pen and made it write blackly. "But till you've proved your royalty to him, you never want to see him, as he is only tolerable when he is well underneath. He won't know what that means exactly, but in his present frame of mind you can safely leave him to construe some pretty galling insult out of it. And tell him you don't in the least care what people like him and his friend think (be sure you bracket the Mountebank with him), which you are proving by writing this letter, of course." And Love-of-Excitement coughed to hide its laughter, as the Princess fell into the trap.

"And now let us go and see the Queen and be comforted," said Love-of-Emotion.

"No, no, no!" squealed the little Black Monkey, between whom and the Queen there was a great and mutual antipathy.

"You just shall!" said the Princess viciously. "And I hope the Queen will make you ashamed of yourself. I'm not going to let you shirk her, however bad you feel."

A wretched Princess got into a hansom; an impatient Princess drove through the streets of the city; a miserable-eyed Princess walked into the Queen's room in the Queen's own palace, and stood in the midst of the floor in tragic silence.

"Why, what's the matter?" said the Queen, rising from her desk. "Oh, *not* the little Black Monkey!"

"Oh, he's made me so wretched!" said the Princess, with a burst of tears, and away from the palace of the Queen fled the little Black Monkey, for it dared not stay a moment longer in her presence.

"You dear, ridiculous little Princess!" said the Queen. "Why, whatever is the matter?" and she put her arms around her, and kissed and kissed her; and the Princess sank down on the sofa beside the beautiful Queen, and hid her hot little face against the Queen's soft shoulder.

"Tell me all about it," said the Queen, and so the Princess told her all from the very beginning.

"Oh, you silly, silly little sweetie!" said the Queen, and Love-of-Emotion sighed, it felt so happy.

"I have often been rude to men," said the Princess, still sobbing. "But I didn't think men were ever rude to girls. Men have been far more angry with me than the Prince was, and with far more cause, but no one has ever humiliated me like that before. I

don't mind being told my faults for my good, but when it comes to being laughed at——"

"You've always been let off too easily," said the Queen. "Don't you think you deserve to be punished for all the cruel things you say?"

"The Prince is such an enormous, big, strong person," said the Princess. "And I'm only a little sort of girl. If he'd been a true Prince, however hurt he had been, he would not have humiliated me."

"Nonsense!" said the Queen, trying not to smile at the Princess's tragic eyes. "The Prince is only a boy, and all boys aren't strong enough to take blows in silence. Poor Prince! I'm sure *he* didn't enjoy his lunch."

"He might have pretended to," said a suddenly reminiscent hostess. "Beast! I don't care!"

"I'm quite sure you don't," said the Queen. "I wish you cared a little more. I do not believe anything in this world will teach you discretion."

"And I don't care about the Mountebank!" said the Princess, very bold and dashing indeed.

"My dear child, people like the Mountebank simply do not exist for you. They are not on this earth," said the Queen, with a flash of magnificent wrath. "Let him say whatever he likes about you. Nice people won't heed him, for the simple reason that they will take his opinion for what it is worth; and the others don't matter to *us*."

"He said there would be False Princes in the world," said the Princess contentedly. "He's always right!"

"He?" said the Queen, and the Princess crimsoned.

"Oh, nothing!" said the Princess, who did not

talk about the Man in Uganda now, even to the Queen. "What are you doing to-night?"

"I'm dining with the Nice Man; then we're going on to see the Jester play," said the Queen. "You must come with us."

"To tell you the truth, I'm rather tired," said the Princess. "I had wired to the Slave that I would dine with him, but I don't feel even up to that now."

"But how are you going to let him know?" said the Queen.

"Oh, he'll wait about for an hour or so outside," said the Princess; "then he'll have dinner alone. It's all right. He's used to it. I wish you'd let me stay here and rest for a bit before I go on to the Fairy's."

"You weren't going there after you'd dined with the Slave?" said the Queen. "What would your Fairy Godmother say to such an improper act?"

"My Fairy Godmother is the dearest person in the world," said the Princess, with dignity, "and understands the ways of Princesses. I wish to goodness Chancery had arranged for me to live with her instead of my Aunt. She's not a *bit* grown-up. She's just as much a pal as the Fairy. I should have a ripping time if I lived with her."

"I think it is just as well you have a little restraint," said the Queen. "I don't like you to disappoint the Slave, but neither do I approve of your dining with him. It will be a very good thing if you will rest here, and I'm more than half inclined to stay with you."

"Oh, but you couldn't disappoint the Nice Man," said the Princess.

"Now what are you up to?" said the Jester, popping his head in at the door. Then he strolled

into the room, and came to the sofa stirring a cup of soup, for he was about to set forth to amuse his master the Public, and needed nourishment.

"I say, you are a beggar!" said the irreverent Jester to the Queen. "Keeping the Nice Man waiting, as you will do if you don't get ready. I wonder he stands it; I do, I do indeed!"

Then the Queen laughed and withdrew to make herself a little more beautiful if possible, and the Jester stood up on the hearthrug with his back to the fire, and drank his soup.

"Well, Stick-in-the-Mud?" said the Jester, who had many pretty names for his friends, of which "Stick-in-the-Mud" was, perhaps, the prettiest.

"Oh, be quiet!" said the Princess. "I'm miserable!"

"Hurrah!" said the Jester, and he put down his soup. "No, not really! Why, what's happened?" and he came and sat down by the Princess.

"I'm not going to tell *you*," said the Princess, very impolite indeed.

"Never mind, we shall all be dead in quite a little while, if you come to think of it," said the Jester consolingly.

"Oh, I don't mind dying!" said the Princess, who would have argued at the gate of heaven. "When I feel strong and happy, I rather look forward to death as an adventure, and when I feel tired and miserable, I look forward to it as a kind of sleep. Everything would lose its charm that went on for ever, life included. I think of life as a dinner," said the Princess, forgetting to be miserable, in the agreeable subject of discussion. "When dinner is ended, no one would want to begin all over again, and they wouldn't en-

joy it if they did. I should make a most philosophical end."

"Shall make," said the Jester. "There's a difference between the future and conjunctive! Ah, life's all right for people with good digestions. Some people can't enjoy their dinner, you know. Others don't get half enough. Others get all the things that they can't bear the taste of. If we were all given a wholesome, interesting, nicely varied dinner, whose dishes had savour, and of which we had never too little or too much, I wouldn't grumble when the bill came at the end. But as it is—it isn't worth it."

"I don't agree with you," said the Princess firmly. "I think it's most fully worth it, and *I've* nothing to complain of."

"*You* happy?" said the Jester incredulously. "Perfectly, perfectly happy?"

"Perfectly!" said the Princess, and felt she had not a care in the world.

"That's all right, then," said the Jester, hopping up with a grin. "Glad I've cheered you so. I always told you I should, when you were miserable."

"Oh, you do get home," said the Princess, scarcely knowing whether to be annoyed or to laugh.

Then the Jester patted her cheek and asked her if she would like to finish his soup, as that was one of the dishes he'd had too much of; and the Princess decided to laugh; and so when the Nice Man walked into the room, he found a very happy little party instead of a sulky one.

Then the Jester hurried himself into his coat and his muffler, and called the Nice Man a rotter, and gave the Princess his blessing, and went off in a

great hurry and scurry to wait on that asking, grasping, never-satisfied master of his.

"Well, how's the kingdom?" said the Nice Man, who lived in the Queen's kingdom, but took a friendly interest in a friendly state, and was greatly beloved by the Princess.

"How's yours?" said the Princess, who did not feel her own affairs flourishing enough to talk about just at that moment.

"As beautiful and as remote as ever," said the Nice Man, with a sigh.

"Your corner is a little dusty," said the Princess sympathetically.

The Nice Man nodded. "It's been awfully cold and lonely," he said sadly. "Scarcely a sight of the Queen."

"Poor dear!" said the Princess. "It's nice to sit on the steps of the throne."

"You sit beside the Queen when you come to pay homage," said the Nice Man enviously.

"You shall come out of your corner whenever I'm here, and sweep in the dust in front of the throne," said the Princess generously.

"Weep in the dust, you mean," said the Nice Man.

"Lay the dust with your tears," said the Princess. "How sweet! You shall be called the Royal Dust-man; and if you are very assiduous in your duties, you shall sit on the lowest step of the throne and rest for one minute, and perhaps—perhaps the Queen shall pat your head."

"You are to pat my head," said the Royal Dust-man solemnly, as a royal vision of lace and loveliness appeared.

"You are perfect babies for talking nonsense,"

said the Queen, and tucked up the Princess on the sofa while the Dustman watched enviously from the dust. "I really think I had better stay with you," said the Queen, looking at the Princess hesitatingly.

"Oh!" said the poor down-trodden Dustman. "When I am giving this special party, invited weeks and weeks ago, in your honour! Think of my guests, if you have no thought for me!"

"I was thinking of the Princess," said the Queen, with a sweet look at the Princess and another almost as sweet look at the Dustman.

"Can't we possibly persuade the Princess to come?" said the Dustman.

"To tell you the honest truth," said the Princess, "I never shut my eyes all night, and I would rather go to sleep now than to all the dinners in the world."

So the Queen kissed the Princess again, and told her to shut her eyes tight immediately; and the Dustman picked up the Queen's fan and her cloak, and meekly escorted the Queen from the palace.

Then the Princess closed her eyes and went fast asleep, as if she had never known a false Prince at all.

XIII.

THE RAINBOW.

"IT'S too good to be true! I can't believe it's really happening!" said the Princess.

"How lucky it was that I happened to come in to-night! You are sure you aren't feeling tired?" said the Poet.

"Tired!" said the Princess. "I have never felt so 'alive' in my life. I love nothing so much in the world as driving at night in a hansom; and now you are with me, who feel exactly as I do, my soul is singing a song, it is so happy!"

"It was ordained that we should dine together," said the Poet. "Which of those stars, I wonder, took pity on us?"

"The little one that is shining over the restaurant, of course!" said the Princess. "Look how sweetly it twinkles, and beckons us in—nice, friendly little star!"

The Princess and the Poet! Alas, yes! For the Poet had come into the palace where the Princess slumbered; and I regret to say, as both the Poet and the Princess had a quite uncontrollable passion for new experiences, they forgot all about convention and prudence and discretion and all the restrictions that society imposes upon its members, and it flashed upon them that here was the opportunity for their so-often-talked-of dinner.

The hansom drew up in front of the glittering portals, and the Princess and the Poet made their way into the restaurant. The band was playing a royally inspiring measure as they entered, the busy waiters buzzed and hummed and darted from one pretty group of flowers to the other. The flowers sat around the snow-decked tables, and their gowns shone gaily in the candle-light, and filled the room with pretty colours, light, and radiance; and amongst them stood and sat the grim black-coated gardeners and guardians of the flowers.

The Princess and the Poet made their way to the Poet's own especial little table; from the gallery they looked down on the people. The music had ended, and the hum of laughing voices and the clattering of plates and dishes came up to them cheerfully.

"Well, I do just like dining in a restaurant," said the Princess, and she smiled at the kind waiter who ran to help her with her travelling-coat. "I must say it is nicer to dine with you all by myself, with no Aunt to embarrass herself. I am going to have a perfect evening, and yet I am doing wrong!" and the Princess opened her eyes wide, in pained surprise at life's many hardships, as she took the seat opposite to the Poet.

"But why wrong?" said the Poet, with his charming smile. "I thought we agreed a Princess could do as she liked?"

"Ye-es," said the Princess. "But that is not saying that what a Princess likes to do is always right. I know perfectly well I am doing not only a foolish but a dishonourable thing in dining here alone with you."

"Now, by all the laws of royalty and fairyland,

it is allowable to deceive a dragon!" said the Poet.

"Really!" said the Princess, with a rush of appreciative dimples. "I can quite understand my Aunt calling you immoral. I don't mean only for encouraging me to disobey her; but your mind is so sweet, you make the wickedest acts seem quaint and charming!"

"Oh, Princess!" said the Poet, pretending to look indignant and shocked.

"You do," said the Princess, in no way perturbed. "What the moralist would call 'deadly sin' to you is 'innocent paganism.' Everything in the world falls into its right and beautiful place, to you! You love Jane Austen and Hafiz. Falstaff in his cups you would compare to a big, fat, lusty bumble-bee, buzzing drunk with honey. You and Browning are a little alike in that. You both say, 'God's in His heaven! All's right with the world!' You would not have shrunk from Verlaine; you would have loved and pitied him."

"Poets have other canons than those of respectable members of society, you know," said the Poet, with rather a sad smile. "Yet alas for the world if all the world were poets!"

"It is best as it is, with all sorts of people in it, isn't it?" said the Princess happily. "But you are so strange, because you even appreciate the moralists who hate you and say such horrible things about you. You think of them as dear lavender-scented old ladies, and love their primness, instead of being angry with them for their intolerance."

"But I am not like them. I don't want conformity—to anything—for anyone," said the Poet,

laughing. "A poet is an onlooker; it is not his to lay down laws or to keep them. He must taste all life has to give—sin, and suffering, and jealousy, and love. And God send him a sense of humour, to keep his digestion sound and healthy!"

"Yes," said the Princess delightedly. "Now I have found out why you are different to the Silly Poets. You are laughing at yourself half the time. You can put yourself in the place of everyone, even the people who sneer and make fun of sentiment. I have always despised poets just a little, but I love being with you!"

"Then why is it wrong to dine with me?" said the Poet.

"Oh, dear!" said the Princess, "now I've remembered again. I know quite well the Queen wouldn't approve; and if she had not been so kind, and allowed me to rest in her palace, I should not have seen you. I feel as if I had broken my parole."

"Why should the Queen mind?" said the Poet.

"She would say it is foolish," said the Princess. "And it is. See how everyone is looking at you! Everyone knows you by sight, because you are a famous person; and they will think me one of the million silly women who are in love with you. I believe the Queen is a little afraid of me falling in love with you, herself!"

"But we agreed to be in love, when we dined together, surely?" said the Poet, with an innocent air of surprise.

The Princess regarded him reflectively.

"I promised to try the effect of myself on you," said the Princess. "I am delighted if you find my personality attractive as well as interesting. I only

find yours interesting," said the Princess, sipping her champagne daintily and regarding the Poet dispassionately over the brim. "No, *that* will not be the way in which I shall be paid out for dining with you. I shall be paid out, you know. There's always a little bill presented to me after one of my experiences. Still, I think it is worth it in this case. We should not have had nearly such an interesting conversation if my Aunt had been here. We should not have had quite the same sort of conversation with the Queen, though I should have enjoyed myself quite as much in a pleasanter, safer way."

"Don't you feel safe with me?" said the Poet reproachfully.

"No," said the Princess bluntly. "But I like skating over thin ice. I enjoy stopping you from making love to me, and the more difficult it is, the greater the excitement."

"Supposing I won?" said the Poet.

"Then the game would be finished," said the Princess, with a shrug of her shoulders. "And I hate people who score off me. However, you will not win. You are too heavily handicapped."

"Handicapped!" said the Poet, with an involuntary glance in the mirror behind the Princess.

"Can't you see it peeping out?" said the Princess, whose eyes missed little. "Your little devil is stronger than mine; it is also more rosy and alluring, but I know the genus."

"Would you kindly explain yourself?" said the Poet.

"The name of our devils is Love-of-Emotion," said the Princess. "And it is our little devils who have brought us here to-night, and are fraternising

so sociably; but they know too much about each other to fall in love."

"But you say my devil is stronger than yours," said the Poet, looking rather daring.

"You are a slave to your devil, I am master of mine," said the Princess royally. "Your devil has knocked your conscience completely out of time, but Conscience always wins over my devil in the end!"

"What may seem wrong to the moralist may not seem wrong to me," said the Poet, in somewhat of a nettled voice.

"I am not going to discuss morality with you," said the Princess, with great firmness. "You are so clever, you can make me think anything you wish to for the moment; but deep in my heart I know the old-fashioned ideas of right and wrong are the true ones. I know I am doing wrong and shall suffer for it, so I am going to have as good a time as possible while I'm with you. If I have to pay my penny, I will enjoy my cake!"

"Then we agree to be just a little in love this evening," said the Poet, who was a very clever Poet.

The music floated softly through the flower-scented air; the candles shone tenderly on the Poet's handsome face; there was an atmosphere of happiness and carelessness in the dim-lit gallery, with its rosy candle-shades and comfortable lounges.

"Why should it be wrong to be a little in love?" said the Princess, and folded her hands and made a little table for her chin. "You are exceedingly nice-looking, your voice is so charming, you have a nice flattering way of looking at me, and you are never in the least embarrassed, are you?"

"It is such a *very* frank and scientific Princess," said the Poet, and laughed outright.

"Oh, you know what I mean," said the Princess, with a propitiating little look. "Some men are so stupid and clumsy when they are in love, I feel ashamed for them. Then others are so flippant and assured, they positively insult you with their admiration. But you are so gracefully humble; you are truly appreciative, just as I am appreciative of you. And we both have the knowledge that we do not care a snap of the fingers for each other in our hearts, so we are not deceiving each other at all."

"We are not deceiving each other nearly enough," said the Poet, whose eyes were dancing.

"Oh, don't say that!" said the Princess. "Don't you think it is rather new and interesting for two students of the craft of love to meet together to discuss it seriously and intelligently? Two such skilled, attractive students! We can sympathise with each other in our love of experience, we can understand so exactly; we may even help each other, if only with sympathy. Oh, it is so charming to talk with a brilliant mind, who understands the poetry and fantasy there is in life!"

"For Kings and Queens, and Poets and Princesses," said the Poet, with the laughter in his eyes veiled with discreet eyelids. He knew that all the world plays make-believe, though only Poets and Princesses be egotist enough, or conceited enough, to imagine their make-believes are interesting to other people.

"Do you know how I would like you to love me?" said the Princess, who did not see into the Poet's mind, and was enjoying herself very much in-

deed. "Just as I do you. I do not want ever to see you again!"

"Oh, but why not?" said the Poet, a little startled.

"Of course, it will be pleasant if we happen to meet," said the Princess, with a beautiful glance, "but it will not matter at all if we don't," continued the Princess, with not quite such beautiful common sense. "We are not in the least dependent on, or necessary to, each other; you know that as well as I do. But I want you to have a sweet little picture in your mind whenever you hear my name, and I will keep an equally beautiful picture in my mind of you."

"That is a charming way of loving!" said the Poet.

"You are a charming person to love," said the Princess, "as long as one does not see too much of you."

"You are not in the least kind, after all," said the Poet, who had never been loved in such a reasonable way before, and found it a quite amusing and new sensation.

"Wouldn't it be foolish to make caviare a daily article of diet? One mustn't cheapen the precious things of life. Seriously, dear Poet, I am sure you have never been so beautifully and yet so cleverly appreciated before!" said the Princess, who seldom erred on the side of undue modesty. "Other women may have adored you, but then they have always been biassed by a personal affection for you. Now I have no human feelings for you at all; I am as impartial as that cold indifferent waiter who waits at the next table. And yet I crown you king of all the poets and all the lovers in this common-place, common-sense age!"

"Inhumanly strong Princess!" said the Poet. "Who knows? Perhaps my tragedy will be to love you humanly!"

"And your heart will be broken," said the Princess, with a satisfied sigh. "What beautiful poems you will write!"

Then the Princess's eyes met the Poet's, and they twinkled together.

"You know the secret, then, of Poets?" said the Poet. "Have we a mistress? We can only bring her to castles of paper! Is she unkind? We haven't even real tears to shed! We drown our sorrow in ink, and prick our hearts so that the ink flows faster."

"Oh, I love, I love you, poor sad Poet!" said the Princess, for the Poet's voice was so lonely and filled with such sad humour that the Princess felt she would give up her crown if she might comfort him. But fortunately she caught sight just then of the wicked fleeting twinkle in the Poet's eyes, and she remembered she was in the presence of a wiser and far, far more skilful student than herself.

"If my Aunt had heard that, she would say I was making a fool of myself," said the Princess sweetly.

"Ah, your Aunt keeps her feelings locked up, like jewels, and only opens the box on state occasions," said the Poet quaintly, "such as weddings and funerals."

"Yes, and then she is so unused to wearing them she is self-conscious and awkward, and they do not suit her at all," said the Princess cruelly. "They weigh her down; they seem so out of place, almost vulgar; they strike the eye so forcibly!"

"There are so few people who can wear the jewels of feeling gracefully," said the Poet, with a sigh.

"Yes; but isn't it silly to keep them locked up so tight?" said the Princess. "I like to hold mine in, my hand, to handle and play with. Then there's some use having them. Besides, people won't show you their feelings if you keep yours hidden, as if you mistrust them. I like comparing my jewels of feeling with those of my friends."

"Jewels—living jewels—are sensitive things," said the Poet. "If one uses them as counters, some will be lost in the handling; and if one play a great deal with them, they get rather knocked about, I'm afraid."

"Oh, well, they are some use to you, anyway!" said the Princess rather impatiently.

"But they are not so precious when they are so accessible," said the Poet. "They become a little banal almost. They lose their charm spread out in the open show-room for all the world to see. The value of a jewel is in its rarity. The most priceless stones lie deepest. Mystery and darkness; how the jewels glow forth in such a setting!"

"I have deep feelings," said the Princess, who detested to be thought shallow.

"You are much too much of a philosopher," said the Poet. "You take too scientific a view of life to be a true artist. Your little mind is always unearthing the whys and wherefores; it doesn't stay still, content to admire and love."

"I am only a philosopher in my mind, not in my heart," said the Princess. "My real self is as elemental as a savage, if you could only strike through my reason and touch my heart. You couldn't, of course, but I know someone——" The Princess suddenly stopped.

"What a morbid tune the band is playing," said the Princess. "I do hate the end of anything, and especially the end of dinner."

"You have made me curious to see those jewels that the world may not touch and defile," said the Poet, looking at the Princess's drooping eyes.

"You will never see them," said the Princess; "not in this life. Yet how well you would understand if one might only talk to you! I wish I had had you for a brother. It is the only relationship in which a woman could have any satisfaction in you. The responsibility of having brought a Poet into the world would weigh so heavily upon a parent. As a husband a Poet is impossible, and yet a Poet must be a husband, to sing the joys of domesticity. As a lover a Poet is too erratic. As a friend—well, you couldn't be friends with a woman. For one thing, you are too selfish; for another, too devoted to your craft."

The Princess leaned her chin on her hands and looked at the poor wandering Poet.

"You are in a wrong world and a wrong age," said the Princess; "a lost Real Poet! Love isn't appreciated now as an art, you know. Yet what a Master Troubadour you would have been! How quaintly, how excellently fantastically you would have ruled a Court of Love! Oh, why ever were you born into our sordid, materialistic age?"

"To show its beauty, perhaps," said the Poet. "There's beauty even in the city if one looks with wide enough opened eyes."

"Sermons in stones, and good in everything," said the Princess. "Good in everything! Yet the good people think you wicked for finding it. Oh, dear,

life's very confusing! Good people look down on half the people in the world, and condemn them and shudder at them. The strong people despise the sins of the man who is self-indulgent. And yet Christianity teaches us that, though sin and vice are wicked, the people who sin are as lovable as the Pharisees. Everyone is wicked, for censoriousness and want-of-sympathy, and want-of-cheerfulness and arrogance, are all sins, just as much as self-indulgent sins. How dare any moralist preach to *you*, who see the beautiful side of everything and love the whole world? "

"The moralist preaches to me, and I preach to the moralist," said the Poet. "We supply texts for each other's sermons. Perhaps the moralist and I are working to the same end, Princess. Yet there is no need for the moralist to trouble, for sin brings its punishment with it, packed up in a neat little portmanteau. It never travels without it, I assure you. We may not always be masters of ourselves, but we are always our judges—judges that wield a heavy scourge! "

"You will have left the world happier than you found it," said the Princess, for the Poet's eyes were so sad and lonely. "Your poems teach people to see the colour of the world."

"That is what I have tried to do—to voice the joy of life," said the Poet ever so humbly; for Real Poets are always humble with people who appreciate and love them.

"And you have done," said the Princess. "You have made my kingdom ever so much more beautiful."

"Then surely I have not lived in vain!" said the Poet. "And, by the bye, Poets must pay homage

to Princesses. Surely ours is a possible relationship—a Real Poet and a Fairy Princess?”

“Of course!” said the Princess. “You are my royal brother.”

“Of course!” said the Poet.

“I shall not in the least regret this experience, *whatever* the bill,” said the Princess. “You are the most understanding person I ever met in my life!”

“I cannot see why there should be a bill to pay,” said the Poet. “If royalty may not occasionally dine together, in *petit comite* . . .”

“Oh, yes,” said the Princess. “That is just what it is. When the outside world has been scornful, and has thrown stones, and misunderstood and done its best to humiliate me and take my kingdom from me, it is very recuperative to leave their cries and shouts outside, and dine quietly with one’s royal kindred. It is not only restful, it is so stimulating. The clamour and stupid rudeness of the populace fall away back into their proper place. The opinion of the common people does not in the least matter to us here, in the serenity and privacy of royalty.”

“Who has dared to hurt you?” said the Poet tenderly.

“I told you I was only a beggar Princess,” said the Princess. “Vulgar minds see the rags and tatters, and appraise my worth at very little. Only royalty knows royalty without its crown!”

“We certainly set crowns on our heads when we dine with each other,” said the Poet, with a twinkle. “To do each other honour, of course,” said the Poet, as the Princess looked up with a suspicious frown.

“I am going,” said the Princess, who was not so easily appeased. “And I think you are very horrid

to make fun. You do not know how horribly insulted and hurt I have been to-day. Now I have crept in to be comforted, and you say with the world, 'There is no palace, and you are not a Princess. You are only a ridiculous, fantastical, conceited beggar.' "

"Tears, Princess?" said the Poet. "Have I betrayed the trust my Princess has in me? Yet surely royalty may smile at the pomps with which royalty surrounds itself. It was a very tender smile, Princess."

"I accept your apology," said the Princess, and smiled at the Poet in a forgiving if rather a quivering way. "But I must go. See, the restaurant is almost empty."

Downstairs the flowers had vanished as if it were October. The Princess rose.

"Now where are you going?" said the Poet, as he helped the Princess with her coat.

"Kensington," said the Princess.

"We will drive up through the gardens," said the Poet, as they went downstairs into the hall. Outside the swinging doors cabs and buses flashed and lumbered by underneath the lofty dark blue skies.

"You are not coming with me," said the Princess.

"Why not?" said the Poet. "You were sweet enough to say there was nothing you loved so much as driving through London at night. Mayn't I share the happiness?"

"All the same——" said the Princess, and hesitated.

"You are not afraid, surely?" said the clever Poet.

"Oh, no, for I have proved it isn't wrong," said the Princess, with knitted brows. "And yet——"

"It is a wonderful night," said the Poet.

They stood on the steps of the restaurant. The air touched one's face with soft warm kisses; London trembled and surged around them and beside them; the distant sounds of traffic broke in through the roar in the crowded horse-road. A hansom shivered alongside the pavement, and stopped with a rattle of hanging chain and swiftly turning wheel.

"How wistfully the stars are shining!" said the Poet, gazing down into the serious little face of the Princess. "Come, let me take you away from the people who fling stones in the high-road."

"Oh, no, no, no!" said the Princess. "Only the King can do that. Dear Poet, you have helped me on my way, but you cannot come any farther. You have paid homage, and I am grateful, but now I must go on alone."

The Princess put her hand in the Poet's; her eyes met his.

"I will always love you with my whole heart," said the Princess. "You have been so kind to me! To-night will be one of the diamond nights that shine in my life."

Then the Poet stood on the kerbstone and watched the Princess's swift hansom cleave through the lumbering buses and disappear into the tumult.

As for the Princess, she looked at herself in the little square of glass inside the hansom, and stared at herself in wonder. To-night, of all nights, Love-of-Emotion should have been enthroned in her eyes, triumphant in her heart, yet Love-of-Emotion's voice was stilled.

"It wasn't goodness that made me stop the Poet from coming, or I should be repenting that goodness

now," said the Princess to her questioning eyes. "Yet, beautiful and interesting as is the Poet, and fond as I am of beautiful emotions, I am here by myself. Why didn't I want the Poet to come with me? Why don't I enjoy pretending to be in love with him? Why did I hate the Prince so much to-day? Why did I feel so ashamed and furious when I thought of the foolish way in which we had flirted? I thought I had arranged with myself I was to have as many experiences as possible! Can it be that I am only a stupid ordinary girl after all, and love just one person in the stupid ordinary way? Yet what is the value of any other sort of love? What is the value of a Poet's love, however beautiful it be, if one must share it with all the beautiful women in the world? What is the value of a Prince's love, which, directly one grasps it, turns to dust and crumbles away in one's hand—a butterfly love? Oh, I wish I had not walked in the dust of the highways! I wish I had stayed a Princess on a throne, whose love might have honoured even a king! I wish I had not dined alone with the Poet, and given people cause to speak slightly of me!" said the Princess, with the cry in her heart for the Someone she was nearly always thinking of, the Someone with the stern eyes and the quiet voice, the Someone who was only a colonial subject, so far, so dreadfully far away from the Princess's kingdom, across the seas in desolate Uganda.

So it was that the Princess's little bill came in!

XIV.

THE FAIRY.

THE annoying part of living in three houses at once is that I never know where any of my things are," said the Princess. "Consequently I'm always buying new things, in which I never have any pleasure at all; for as soon as I have bought them, my lost property at once turns up again. This is the third useless and expensive blotting-book I have had to buy this year," said the Princess, closing a massive silver blotter, "and the fourth fountain pen; and I owe for them all."

"I never run up bills," said the Tailor-made Girl, in her brisk and practical manner. "They only lead to foolish extravagance."

The Princess cast an affectionate glance at the Tailor-made Girl, and stamped her letters with force.

"I should feel disgraced if I owed money to tradespeople," said the Tailor-made Girl, who had not heard the proverb that it is well to leave well alone. "It's so undignified."

The Princess lit an unpaid-for stick of pale green sealing-wax with a dainty little taper running through it, and proceeded to seal her letters in polite silence.

"How wastefully you use your sealing-wax!" said the Tailor-made Girl, as the Princess made ridiculous blobs all over the envelopes and stirred them up with the tip of her finger.

"It doesn't matter! It's not paid for, and never will be!" said the Princess.

"Bills are a mutual arrangement," said the Knight quickly. This was one of the series of uneasy moments he had had since the Tailor-made Girl arrived to stay with the Princess's Aunt.

"My bills were more mutual when they started," said the Princess thoughtfully. "I forgot to tell my Aunt I found the hall floor of the flat strewn with visiting cards when I went in on that little visit I paid to town when I came back from Cornwall. The porter told me the gentleman from Marshall and Snelgrove's had called five times, and had asked for my country address. Fortunately, he could not spare the time to come to Cornwall. I think I shall let my Aunt return to the flat alone for a few weeks, and receive my callers. I have no gift for small talk, and my Aunt shines at it. Besides, she has a cheque-book."

Here the Princess carelessly destroyed three bulky letters, the last of which had a legal appearance.

"You are not tearing up your bills?" said the Tailor-made Girl. "What a very foolish and childish thing to do!"

"I must clear up my desk before I go on the river," said the Princess. "How can I enjoy myself, with threatening letters and summonses all over the house?" And the Princess dropped blue fragments airily into the waste-paper basket. "Now my mind is free."

"I could never have a single moment's self-respect if I were being dunned for money," said the Tailor-made Girl.

The Princess hummed a tune and locked up her tidy desk.

"Personally, I cannot see the difference between buying goods you cannot pay for and thieving," said the Tailor-made Girl, without an undue display of self-control.

"But then you aren't very good at seeing things, are you?" said the Princess sympathetically. "I have noticed it."

"Do you mean that I am dull?" breathed the Tailor-made Girl.

"We cannot all be clever," said the Princess, ostentatiously devoting herself to polishing up the lock of her desk. "In fact, cleverness is a great responsibility. I am sure I often think dullness has its advantages. People do not expect anything of you; you are not required to be continually entertaining or amusing. People will not understand that even the cleverest, wittiest girls have headaches sometimes." And the Princess looked under her eyelids at the purple face of the Tailor-made Girl.

"There are far worse things than being dull," said the Princess kindly. "You might be plain!"

"Or conceited," said the Knight, as he rose from his seat by the Tailor-made Girl and strolled loftily to the door.

"Of course it is foolish to be conceited when you have nothing to be conceited about!" said the Princess sweetly, now very busy in polishing her key.

"I say, when *are* you people coming?" said the Fairy, twittering in through the window.

"I have been ready this last half-hour!" said the Tailor-made Girl, in a frosty monosyllabic fashion.

"We have been discussing the ethics of bills," said

the Princess. "And most frightfully interesting we find them!"

The Princess put her key in her desk with restored self-confidence. The Fairy was the Lord High Chamberlain of the Princess's kingdom; and though the outside world saw him only as a graceless youth, with a non-moral though fascinating mind, the Princess knew he was of sterling worth and had a quite invulnerably common-sensical view of things and people.

"Oh, the darkest of clouds has a bright silver lining—
Bills! Bills! Bills!

When no coin in your pockets so brightly is shining—
Bills! Bills! Bills!

You can run 'em up quick

On a bountiful tick.

So why should we sorrow,

When every fresh morrow

We can run up new bills, bills, bills!"

sang the Fairy in brilliant impromptu, as he pirouetted round the table.

"I can see no humour in making a jest of one's duties," said the Tailor-made Girl, and the Fairy stopped short and stared at her.

"Where's your mater?" said the Princess quickly to the Fairy.

"On the lawn," said the Fairy, plunging his hands into his pockets and abandoning the Tailor-made Girl as an unsolved mystery.

"I want to speak to her," said the Princess, and departed through the window.

The Princess's Aunt was haranguing a gardener. The Princess's Fairy Godmother was sitting in the rose-arbour, some little space away. The Fairy's

mother had hair of silvery grey, and her eyes were as blue as forget-me-nots. Her cheeks were soft and pink, and she was such a pretty, youthful-looking old lady that everybody fell in love with her at once. She had very dignified ways, but a kindly, humourous twinkle in her bright eyes; and she was the dearest friend and confidante of all the young people she knew. She never lectured the Princess, even for her good; so the Princess adored her almost as much as the Fairy, and he was the most devoted of all his mother's slaves.

"I say, is my Aunt coming on the river with us?" said the Princess.

"Don't you want her to?" said the Fairy Godmother, with a delicious little twinkle in her eyes.

"To tell you the truth," said the Princess, "I can't score off the Tailor-made Girl when my Aunt's there; and I've been insulted to such a degree this morning I have been simply praying for the Fairy to come and rescue me. But if my Aunt goes on the river, the Fairy won't be able to say a word or do a thing!"

"I'll start your Aunt on the Education Question if you like," said the Fairy Godmother. "Then she'll have to stay at home to read me pamphlets."

"Oh, you darling!" said the Princess. "But I couldn't let you be bored like that!"

"Oh, my dear, I shan't be taking much notice," said the Fairy Godmother. "I shall go on with my knitting. And the river is so damp in September—I'd much rather sit here in a comfortable chair with my feet on a nice warm rug. You go along, and whisper to the Fairy why I'm not coming, and I'll see after your Aunt!"

"You're a perfect brick!" said the Princess, and meant it.

"Shall I tell you a secret?" said the Fairy Godmother, with wicked twinkling eyes. "I hate the Tailor-made Girl myself!"

So the Aunt was decoyed into the harbour by the benevolent Fairy Godmother, and the young people drove off to the river. The Tailor-made Girl mounted to the box seat beside the Knight; and the Princess and the Fairy sat behind, and told each other silly rhymes till the crimson groom stared out in desperation at the flying scenery, and underwent intense internal agonies in his endeavour to suppress himself, until they reached their destination at the river.

The Tailor-made Girl plunged briskly into the stern, and settled herself on the seat with the steering ropes over her shoulders. The Knight sat on the seat in front of her, and pulled stroke as an active Knight should do. The Princess and the Fairy collected all the cushions from the carriage and the boat-house, and arranged themselves elaborately in the bows; the process was invested with royal solemnity, and took time.

"Shall you ever be ready?" said the Knight, as the Princess despatched the ever-willing Fairy to the boat-house for a suddenly-thought-of fortieth cushion.

"My dear fellow, we must be comfortable," said the Fairy, pausing to point his toe and strike an elfish attitude. Then he danced up to the boat-house, with fluttering hands and tiny teetering steps, to the intense delight of the boat-house men and the Princess, and the equally intense rage and confusion of the Knight and the Tailor-made Girl.

"Do for goodness sake come on!" said the Knight, as the Fairy emerged from the boat-house, the cushion poised lightly on his Panama.

"I fly upon a sunbeam!" cried the Fairy in his youthful voice, and stretched out his arms to the Knight, and shot down the bank on the tips of his toes in the style approved of fairy ballerinas.

The cushion fell from the Fairy's head on to the top of the Knight, and the Tailor-made Girl caught it just in time to save it from a watery grave.

The Fairy reclaimed it with effusive gratitude; then he lifted up the seat behind the Knight, piled up the few cushions that the Princess had vouchsafed to him from her abundance, and lay down with his back against the Princess's own pile of cushions.

The Knight pulled out with vigorous strokes, the Tailor-made Girl steered in a capable manner, and the Fairy and the Princess peeped round at each other and smiled.

"I do love to see them working; don't you?" said the Fairy.

"They are doing their best to serve us," said the Princess kindly, "and though the Knight's stroke is rather weak and jerky, we must recognise their wish to please and have pity on their incapacity."

"You must come down again in November," said the Knight to the Tailor-made Girl, in a lofty tone which showed his indifference to the trifles behind him. "I can give you an excellent mount."

"Do you ever hunt otters here?" said the Tailor-made Girl.

"That sounds like Peter Piper, doesn't it?" said the Fairy. "Do you ever hunt hotters here?—oh, do try and say it!"

"Do you ever 'unt hotters here?" said the Princess, plunging into fathomless aspirateless depths. "Oh, isn't it difficult? Do you ever 'unt otters 'ere?"

"Do you everunt rotters 'ere?" said the Fairy gaily. "Do you ever——"

"Shut up!" growled the Knight between his teeth.

"But you haven't answered," said the Fairy, with exasperating cheerfulness. "There's no harm in asking a simple question, surely. Do you ever—hunt—otters—here? Are you deaf, old chap? We've all been asking you this last half-hour."

"The Cookham reach looks rather jolly in October, doesn't it?" said the Knight to the Tailor-made Girl.

"H'm! A lot of thanks we get for taking an intelligent interest in their conversation!" said the Fairy. "I very nearly give up entertaining them."

"The tints of the foliage are so varied," said the Tailor-made Girl. "And it is so nice to have the river all to one's self!"

"By Jove! yes. We can sing now!" said the Fairy, closing his eyes luxuriously and raising his voice in a piercing falsetto.

"Oh where and oh where is my Highland laddie gone?

He's made his way to Scotland, and left the river alone;

And it's oh—oh—oh—oh—oh—oh—in my heart I wish he would stop in his unspeakably Scottish home!"

"Will you kindly be silent!" said the Knight, with a savage gasp, as a smart little launch ran past and a surprised-looking lady bowed coldly to the Knight.

"I *quite* give up trying to entertain them," said the Fairy resolutely.

The Knight and the Tailor-made Girl began to discuss the cricket averages of the season.

"It's their place to entertain us, I think," said the Princess.

"Fairest and sweetest of Princesses!" said the Fairy, "their place is to lick up the dust in the roads over which our scullions' motor-cars may fly. As for their daring to raise their eyes to us, much less their voices, the idea is too much above their poor minds to allow them to even contemplate it. Entertain us! when the greatest wits and jesters of the day, from James Welch to Henry Irving, are proud to stand in a queue and perform on the chance of some day getting a word from us! Why, the idea is too laughable! Imagine us listening to the puny wit of our scullions' road-lickers! I should consider it an insult if such vermin spoke to us, or even dared to show they knew we were here!" said the Fairy, raising his voice to a piercing treble, while the Knight and the Tailor-made Girl attempted careless chat. "If we in our condescension vouchsafe to them the privilege of whispering to each other, as they lie in their gutters, waiting for our scullions to fling them their daily crust as their motors flash past on the clean-licked roads—if we vouchsafe them this, they will not, I hope, encroach upon it! I say I hope they will not mistake the privilege and encroach upon it!" shrieked the Fairy, his voice ascending into a shrill pipe.

The Knight was foolishly betrayed into an answer.

"I wish you'd shut up!" said the Knight. "It's impossible to have any sensible conversation when you're yelling behind."

"They are so awed by the majesty of our proxim-

ity, they dare not even chat with each other, poor wretches!" said the Fairy complacently. "Our dazzling presence takes all the savour from their poor pleasure. Once on a time, I doubt not, they enjoyed their simple chats, but now they have gazed on our shining faces, and they appear dull and common to each other. Oh, Princess, will you step down in your majesty and deign to notice these, the humblest of your kingdom's insects? A waggle of your finger, and how joyous they would be!"

"We have not the faintest desire to speak to you, thanks," said the foolish Knight, whose long experience of the Fairy's flow of language should have served him better.

"They are utterly oppressed and cast down by the thought!" said the Fairy. "They are stricken as with thunderbolts! They lie supine and shivering! See how their hands are trembling! How their poor mean faces flush! Alas for the inexorable laws of nature, which have made us so witty and magnificent, and others of such mean clay! Yet the clods have their places in your kingdom, gracious and worshipful Princess, even as I, your head Fairy."

"The clod is allowing the boat to rock a good deal," said the Princess severely. "I am seriously thinking of frowning at him."

"Good gracious! The weir's open!" said the Tailor-made Girl. "Why, the current's taking us down! Turn round as fast as you can!"

"I can't get her round," said the Knight, with a crimson face, and pulling himself half out of the boat.

"Most negligent!" said the Fairy from his gracefully recumbent pose.

"Sit up and catch on to the sculls, you fool!" gasped the Knight. "D'you hear!"

"I have just had a most laughable dream," said the Fairy, with half-closed eyes and a radiant youthful smile. "I dreamt one of our meanest worms sat up on its tail, and, going black in the face with the thought of its presumption, addressed me. The amusing vision caused me to laugh so heartily that I awoke."

The boat surged and rocked. The Tailor-made Girl seized the paddle. The Princess and the Fairy maintained a royal composure.

"I hate using our power," said the Fairy, "but if the boat joggles again, I shall have to give both these poor clods notice!"

"Did you hear me tell you to take an oar!" gasped the Knight between his teeth.

"Though Heaven knows what will become of them if we do," said the Fairy. "I shall hear their cries in my sleep, I am so beastly soft-hearted," and he closed his eyes.

"Take the scull, you blank idiot! I can't hold us back!" said the Knight.

"When you dream a dream three times," said the Fairy, "isn't there some odd superstition that something is going to happen? Because I have dreamt my dream about the audacious worm for the third——"

The boat rushed down the stream.

"Oh, stop us somehow!" shrieked the Princess.

"Fairest and most worshipful Princess, thy behests are but voiced to be obeyed," said the Fairy, and lunged out at the bank with the boat-hook, of which

he had possessed himself two or three minutes ago. The hook caught on to the branch of an overhanging tree; the Fairy held on with a grip of iron; in another minute the Fairy had safely pulled the boat to land. "Any further commands, oh, Princess?" said the Fairy, in his airiest manner.

"I cannot see the sense of such childishness," said the Tailor-made Girl, whose hands were red with the mark of the ropes. "We were as nearly drowned as possible."

"Their carelessness and lack of skill nearly endangered our lives. What punishment does your highness command?" said the Fairy.

"Oh, I think we'll forgive them," said the Princess, weak with laughter.

"Perhaps 'twere best. They owe their miserable lives to us! We will simply allow them to oppress themselves with cringing gratitude. You are forgiven!" translated the Fairy, with a gracious wave of the boat-hook, which quite inadvertently knocked off the Knight's straw hat into the stream. "Look at your hat, fellow, floating to its doom!" said the Fairy severely. "You might have been sitting in the weir, waiting for it, if my wand had not intervened and saved you, you cream-faced coward! No! I will accept no thanks. You are of too low clay for me to shake you by your menial hand!"

Then the Fairy lay down on his cushions again, clasping the boat-hook, as a hatless Knight turned on him.

"Will you kindly sit up and row?" said a livid Knight.

"We've got to get back somehow," said the Princess. "I really think you'd better."

"You will sit up and pull up this backwater, or go out of the boat," said the Knight, in a strangely quiet voice.

"Do get up," said the Princess quickly. "I—I order you!"

"If my Princess orders, I must obey," said the Fairy, in a voice whose reproach was heart-breaking. He sat up slowly and put the seat across the boat again. Then he took the sculls and pulled with disgraceful ease up stream; the Fairy's laziness was misleading. The boat came easily round under the bridges into the safe waters of the main stream, and the Fairy dropped his sculls with celerity. "You are sure you feel safe now in the hands of our incompetent slaves?" said the Fairy, with charming deference.

"You are at hand, dear Fairy, to rescue me if they should blunder," said the Princess, hiding her laughter in the cushions.

"Then, my good fellow, you shall try once more," said the Fairy, pulling up his seat on the instant and dropping into the cushions. "Now see if you can take us through the lock. But mind! If you feel the least bit nervous, hail me at once! Our Princess's life must not be risked again." Then, in the sure knowledge of a peaceful journey home, the Fairy pushed back his enormous planter's hat and turned his beautiful boyish face up to heaven with the smile of an early Italian angel.

The Knight pulled on in dogged silence; he had at last learnt the futility of bandying words with the Fairy and the Princess. They came up to the lock, the gates swung open, and they entered into the deserted waters of the Cookham lock.

"Oh, come, my love, with me!
Oh, come again!
I've sought thee everywhere,
Ye-et sought—in—vain!"

sang the Fairy, in his angel falsetto, smiling beautifully into the face of the lock-keeper, who was an old and valued friend.

"With longing heart I wait
And wor-ship thee!
Oh, do not hesitate,
But come to me!"

sang the Fairy, supine on his back, as he stretched out his hands with extravagant gestures of devotion, and otherwise indicated a desire for the society of the lock-keeper.

The smart little launch puffed up behind, and entered the lock. The Fairy had raised his voice again in spirited appeal. The Princess caught sight of the crimson neck of the unhappy Knight.

"Down! down! down!" shouted the Fairy, and threw up his arms imploringly as the boat descended with the water. His feet poised high in the air, his hand waving a mournful farewell handkerchief to his friends on shore, the Fairy sang lugubrious fragments of "The Diver," while the lock-keeper hung over the gates, helplessly mirthful, and the lady in the launch gave up all attempts to suppress her smiles.

The Tailor-made Girl and the Knight preserved a silence which was more miserably damping than the clammy dripping walls which stood up from the lock.

"Will you hand me the boat-hook?" said the Knight shortly; the launch puffed past. The Fairy raised his voice in a final solo.

"Hand him the boat-hook, and be quiet!" said the Princess.

"Well!!!!" said the Fairy, stunned by the Princess's desertion.

"Hand me the boat-hook!" said the Knight again.

"Look sharp!" said the Princess.

The Fairy lifted up the boat-hook, and directed the boat from out of the lock with an expression of silent stupefaction.

"Now you'd better row!" said the Princess, as they issued forth in safety.

"Thanks! There's no need!" said the Knight, in tones of ice.

"Please go on with your interesting conversation. We would not check such a flow of humour for worlds," said the Tailor-made Girl. "If you think it worth while to perform to such a limited audience—I can't see another boat in sight."

Then the Knight and the Tailor-made Girl began to discuss the prospects of the hunting season, and the Fairy turned round on his cushions and faced the Princess resolutely.

"Well!!!!" said the Fairy. "I've been fighting for you all the afternoon, we win a glorious and annihilating victory, and then you deliberately give me up!"

"I can't help it," said the Princess. "When I've scored off people, I always give in; I feel so horribly sorry for them!"

"Then what's the good of winning?" said the Fairy pertinently; he was still smarting from the sting of his tailor-made enemy.

"It's not much good to me," confessed the Princess. "I don't hate them a bit now; isn't it strange?"

The Fairy lay flat on his back and whistled; the Princess's sudden changes were beyond his powers of appreciation. The Knight and the Tailor-made Girl were talking in low murmurs. The splash of the oars came regularly through the autumn stillness. The trees that rose up from the Cliveden bank were mirrored in the water, and the Princess gazed down into submerged forests of gold and brown and crimson. The sun was sinking fast, and its warm golden light lay in sheets along the river. The Fairy's whistle died away; his eyes were closed.

"Why, even the Tailor-made Girl looks pretty now!" thought the Princess. "I can understand the Knight being in love. She is only intolerant because she is so young, and so good, and sweet-minded, and serious herself. She is as fresh as the scent of lavender on a summer's morning before breakfast. And what a pretty pink colour is coming into her cheeks!"

"Is anything the matter?" said the Tailor-made Girl's clear young voice.

"The matter!" said the Princess, awaking with a start to the consciousness that the Tailor-made Girl was addressing her. The Fairy gently opened his eyes.

"You have been staring at me for the last ten minutes," said the Tailor-made Girl, in the coldly reproving tone she habitually used to the Princess.

"Do you want to know what I was thinking?" said the Princess, who adored being honest when it was sufficiently unexpected.

The Tailor-made Girl's expression conveyed a polite indifference.

"I was thinking," said the Princess deliberately,

"how pretty your hair looked in the sunlight, and how sweet your frock was; and then I thought I would like to have a frock like that; and then I was comparing you to the scent of lavender with the dew upon it."

The Princess stopped breathless; the Tailor-made Girl was an embarrassed crimson. The Princess knew the Knight's eyes were actively endorsing every word of the Princess's eulogy.

"She's afraid of him, because she's in love," thought the Princess. "She isn't used to wearing her feelings, but they aren't unbecoming. I can quite understand a man liking to see a girl look away from him like that. If I were a man, I would prefer a girl to be embarrassed rather than assured like me." And the absurd and sentimental Princess felt a delicious and virtuous thrill of maternal love towards the couple in the stern.

"Well!!!" said the Fairy. "How you can cringe like that to them, when that little prig has snubbed you so!" The Fairy broke off. The Knight and the Tailor-made Girl were speaking in disconnected sentences to each other.

"I only said what I had been thinking," said the Princess, who did not like to be called to account, even by her head Fairy.

The Fairy suddenly lifted two very expressive and beautiful dark-blue eyes to the Princess's face. "Would you like to know what *I* have been thinking?" said the Fairy. "That you have been jealous——" The Fairy paused, abashed.

"Most horribly jealous!" said the Princess, who was seldom embarrassed. "That was what made me wonder what her good points were, which had made

the Knight prefer her to me; and when I had found them out, I could not help appreciating them."

The Fairy stared blankly at the Princess.

"I can't help it," said the Princess, laughing and blushing together. "I know it's very silly, but when I am jealous of a girl, I am always so interested to know where she has scored over me, that I always end by being thoroughly interested in her for herself. In fact, jealousy has been the prelude to nearly all my dearest girl friendships."

"Do you mean to say you think you'll be friends with *that*?" said the Fairy, still in quiet stupefaction.

"I think it will be very good for her to be friends with me," said the Princess cheerfully.

The Fairy lit a cigarette and resigned his share of the conversation.

The twilight deepened. The Knight had turned for home. The mists were stealing up along the river. The Fairy sat up as they re-approached the lock, and lent a hand of his own free will; then he took his sculls and pulled up vigorously. The air was rather chill.

The Knight and the Tailor-made Girl found their seclusion interrupted. The Fairy had none of the weakness for sentiment that distinguished the Princess. Conversation became at once strictly general and cheerful. The Princess lay on the cushions in the bows. The voices sounded dreamlike in the gathering darkness. Suddenly the Tailor-made Girl's clear voice struck through the air like a peal of bells.

"Do you remember that cousin of mine whom you met at the Sports Club?"

The Princess lifted her head from the cushion.

"The Man from Uganda?" said the Knight.

"Yes. Have you heard his uncle has died and he has come into the estate? He sailed for home yesterday."

The Princess's heart stood quite still. "*He sailed for home yesterday!*" In three weeks he would be here!

And he had not written to tell her he was coming! He had never written a line since she had sent that foolish, foolish letter to him so many weeks ago—the letter the Black Monkey had dictated, the letter that had told him of the Prince.

The oars splashed out of the water and tumbled into the sides of the boat. The Fairy caught on to the landing-stage with the boat-hook, and steadied the craft while the Princess landed.

The mists were creeping along the meadows, and the carriage lamps shone through it like soft bright stars. The Princess stood a little way apart from the others; they were collecting the cargo of cushions from the boat.

The Fairy's conversation seemed suddenly to have become quite stupid; the Knight's chilling air was no longer humorous. As for the Princess's fairy kingdom, it had turned into a desert.

"It's a ridiculous game," said the Princess to the river. "Fairyland pretences are for children. We're grown-up people, and anyone sensible laughs at us. The Quiet Man has been laughing at me all the time too. When it comes to the real things of his life, I have no part in them. So by writing all those letters I've made a fool of myself again, and this time I've got to pay for it. I don't care!"

But the Princess's defiance did not ring true.

She looked on at the river ; life seemed a cheerless and barren performance.

" You knew my cousin, didn't you ? " said the sharp clear voice of the Tailor-made Girl at the Princess's elbow.

" He spent his last week with us, I believe, before he went to Uganda," said the Princess mechanically.

" Yes, we were abroad," said the Tailor-made Girl.

" I didn't know he was your cousin," said the Princess. " So *that's* why the Knight asked him down ! "

The Princess suddenly realised that she was speaking in a manner dejected enough to attract the attention of even a Tailor-made Girl.

" I think they're waiting for us," said the Tailor-made Girl, in a strangely kind and gentle voice.

" She thinks I'm miserable because the Knight likes her best ! " thought the Princess, with a pang of weary annoyance. Oh, well, let her think it ! Let them all think it ! Perhaps they won't bother me with their conversation if they think I'm sulking."

And it shows how very, very miserable the proud and satirical Princess was, when I tell you she followed the Tailor-made Girl to the carriage without a word to undeceive her that she was not jealous.

XV.

THE SERPENT.

THE Serpent had coiled herself among the cushions on the Chesterfield. The firelight shone on sparkling buckles and Louis XV. heels, for the tail of the Serpent lay ruffled up upon the sofa, and cascaded thence in lacey softness on to the carpet, and the Serpent's dainty ankles were thus exposed to view. The Serpent's dark head rested on a golden cushion, her eyes shone with a wicked light, and from her parted lips the smoke of a cigarette issued forth in a sinuous baleful trail. A glass of something that was golden and foaming stood on the little table beside the Serpent's insidious hand, and every now and then the Serpent became conscious of its presence.

The drawing-room of the flat was in semi-darkness. Two candles burned on the Princess's own writing-table—and through the two windows that opened on to the narrow balcony rays of moonlight entered and lay upon the carpet; and a cheerful fire burned in the open grate and cast sparkling lights and shadows on the walls and ceiling.

The Princess had ensconced herself upon a great fat baby ottoman, which she had pulled close up to the fire, and she leant her head against the Chesterfield and looked up at the Serpent in a fascinated manner.

Summer was over now, and the Aunt and the Princess had returned to town. It was the dampest and most depressing season of the year; perhaps that is why the Princess had lost her roses and had been so very subdued and quiet since her return to town. The Aunt, who knew everything, ascribed the change in the Princess's happy disposition to the weather. The Knight, who thought he knew a good deal, ascribed the Princess's depression to jealousy of the Tailor-made Girl, and felt extremely awkward and uncomfortable in consequence. The Queen was away from town; and this was a pity, for the Queen was the only person in the world who could have put her soft and tender fingers on the exact location of the Princess's hurt. And as suppressed confidences lead to irritated tempers, the Princess's happy and fortunate relations had been reaping a goodly harvest from the Princess's unspoken sorrows. To say that the Princess was trying at this period would be to put it politely; to say that she was almost impossible to live with would be truthful.

As a practical woman, the Aunt had looked about her for some outlet for the Princess's flow of satire other than that which her home might afford. It was at this time that the Aunt had met the Serpent. The Serpent was a brilliant young woman who had attracted general notice by her works on the relations of the sexes, in which she championed the cause of Woman with as large a W as even the Aunt could wish. The Serpent was attracted to the Princess by reason of her present attitude of rebellion against all mankind; and as the Serpent was very worldly-wise and clever, she gauged the Aunt to a T, and disguised her serpentine ideas in such insinuating serpent talk that the Aunt

fell under her spell and imagined she had found an ideal intelligent friend for the Princess..

As for the Princess, it is unnecessary to say she welcomed the Serpent's wickedness and wit with most unholy joy. She had not a single idea in common with the Serpent, but that did not make either the Princess or the Serpent the less interesting to each other.

To-night the Serpent had been dining with the Aunt and the Princess; now the Aunt had betaken herself to a public meeting, and the Serpent remained to console the Princess. The Knight was dining at his club. The Princess had not informed him that the Serpent was coming to-night, as, like the Prince, she liked to keep some of her friends all to herself. So she sat on the little ottoman and listened to the words of wisdom which fell from the Serpent's lips, and looked up fascinated into the Serpent's dark and baleful eyes.

"And so life is not worth living?" said the Princess, in awe-struck accents.

"For two-thirds of women, certainly not!" said the Serpent, and her voice was as airy and insouciant as if she were uttering the frothiest persiflage. "The other third may have moments of happiness, but even they will have disappointments in proportion to their pleasure. You know the proverb, 'The happiest days of a woman's life are the days of her marriage and her funeral.' As there are three women to every man, two-thirds of our sex have only their funeral to look forward to."

"Do you know why my Aunt asked you to dinner to-night?" said the Princess severely. "Because I have been depressed since I came up to town, and she

thought it would not be good for me to spend an evening alone. You are supposed to be cheering me up."

"My dear child, one must face the truths of life," said the Serpent.

"Well, why aren't men unhappy, too?" said the Princess, in an injured voice.

"Men are allowed the right of self-expression," said the Serpent; "women are not."

"I express myself," said the Princess loftily. "I am sure I devote much more time and thought to my little temple than I could do if I were only a man. What pleasure can men take in their hideous clothes, or in doing the little hair that is allowed to them? Men have to have purposes and responsibilities and duties, and dry things like that, or they are considered unmanly and despised. Now, no one thinks any the worse of women who take a careless view of life. Men constantly talk about politics, and stocks, and shares, and agriculture, and the War Office; no woman is expected to. If men have more strength than we have, they have to use it in our service, or be branded as unchivalrous cads; and, for that matter, strength is the principal attribute of a slave. Men have to submit to be bullied and snubbed and made fools of, and if they attempt to retaliate they are called unmanly again. Poor, helpless, goaded wretches! When I think of the way in which I have insulted most of the men I know, and then see how meekly they bear it, without getting a shred of credit for their patience from me or anyone else; and then when I think how good they are to me, I am filled with shame that I have no vestige of pity for them, or, indeed, anything but good-natured toler-

ance. Never, in the whole of my life, have I wished to be a man for a single moment. A woman can do as she wants to much more than a man."

"There's one little difference," said the Serpent, with an airy smile. "If a man sins, no one thinks the worse of him. It's only 'sowing his wild oats,' 'boys will be boys,' and all the rest of the time-honoured, conventional glossing over of his wrongdoing; but if a woman express herself, if a woman yield to her natural instincts, the door of every decent house is closed against her. That's the only difference, my child!"

"My goodness!" said the Princess, most fearfully insulted, "I don't want to express myself by sinning, thank you; nor do any of the girls I know."

"Every woman in the world has a vicious devil hidden in her," said the Serpent, in no way disturbed by the Princess's look of indignation.

"I'm not on speaking acquaintance, then, with mine," said the Princess, with uplifted chin and flashing eyes.

"It is only hypocrisy and convention that have made women ashamed of the instincts they were born with," said the Serpent.

"It is not natural for me to be wicked, nor for my chums!" said the Princess furiously; and the Housewife flashed to her mind, and half a dozen other girls whom the Princess knew and loved. "We are princesses, not tramps! I feel as if you had insulted us! You may think me a hypocrite for being so angry, but all the girls I honour with my friendship, and who honour me with theirs, feel exactly as I do."

"My dear," said the Serpent, "you have only a baby's view of life; you live in the stars, and know

nothing about it. The sorrows and temptations that most women have to suffer are simply Greek to you. If you had known the women I have known, and seen their whole lives starved and stultified and atrophied, simply by the lack of opportunity for the expression of those instincts which every woman is born with—every healthy natural woman——”

“If they’re unhealthy they should go in for physical culture, and eat Plasmon,” said the Princess, “or Grape Nuts, or Force! I have tried them all, separately, and at once. And they should live out of doors and take exercise. If women are morbid, it means they are unhealthy. I am miserable when I am in town, because town air is bad for a person. It is simply a question of being run down!”

“Unfortunately, we are given minds as well as bodies,” said the Serpent. “And to some of us is allotted a temperament. I admit it’s a troublesome possession.”

“Well, you should take something for it, then,” said the Princess impatiently. “The more a person is developed intellectually, the more capable they ought to be of reasoning away unhappiness. If they are sensitive to sorrow, they are more sensitive to pleasure than others. I believe everyone has the same opportunities for happiness, only some people are more sensible than others, and know how to make more of theirs, that’s all. Mind, I am not saying I am always sensible, but I know I ought to be. It is right to be happy, and it is wrong to be unhappy.”

“Yes; but who can give us a recipe for being happy?” said the Serpent.

“Oh, I can give you a recipe,” said the Princess promptly. “I *know* the way to be happy, if I do not

always follow it. It is simply this. Never want anything that it is impossible for you to have, but want everything that it is possible to acquire with proportionate earnestness. Thus you will always have plenty of attainable little goals in view. Determine to get the fullest possible measure of enjoyment out of everything that happens to you. If quiet days come, regard them as opportunities for rest, and value them for the sake of the contrast they afford to the amusing days of your life: after all, the quiet days are often the most contented ones. And when disappointments or checks or humiliations come to you, wipe them off the slate as fast as they occur: don't keep them in your mind as examples or warnings or lessons; just deliberately forget them, and only keep in your mind the happy events that have happened to you."

"Ah, you take life so lightly," said the Serpent. "You have never experienced it, you see."

"Oh, you make me tired!" said the Princess, who was never more irritated than when people refused to consider her theories as worthy of argument. "What business have you to be unhappy? You are brilliantly clever and charming and successful. You have a sweet flat of your own, and absolute independence. You can dash off abroad whenever you want to, and do. You are able to appreciate the delights of frocks, as well as the delights of literature and art and music. Your senses have been cultivated to a superfine degree, and you have a big circle of devoted friends. You are not forced to live in an uncongenial element, as so many women are; you are not forced to do any domestic task; you do not even have to housekeep your flat. The thing is you have much too good a time, and so you devote your leisure to

making yourself unhappy. I admit this makes you very subtle and interesting to intellectual people, but come off the grass for a minute, and own up that there are millions of women who would give their heads to be you."

"No one would envy me if they looked in my heart," said the Serpent.

"If you have a black spot in your heart, keep it safely locked up in it," said the Princess wisely. "So tightly locked up that no one can peep inside, even yourself. When people keep taking the ugly black spot out, and looking at it, and showing it to people, it makes it so much more prominent. If you take no notice of it, neither will other people. Good heavens! Why are disadvantages given us, if not to fight against and conquer? There are such millions of things on earth that one may be. If accident has debarred you from taking one particular road, there are a hundred other roads that are open to you. If one has pluck and confidence, however far, however difficult the journey, one will arrive where one wishes to go!"

"Fate throws a string across the path and trips us where we are most certain of success," said the Serpent. "I am afraid for you sometimes, because you are so happy and so confident."

"I wish you wouldn't talk so depressingly," said the Princess. "You make me feel frightened. I simply cannot imagine myself permanently miserable. I am a little under the weather now, that is all; but there is not a night that I do not tell myself, '*This will not last. You were just as unhappy as this when you thought yourself in love with the Slave.*' Every summer the flowers die; every spring they come again.

Why should the winter of our discontent oppress us?" said the poetical and literary Princess, feeling she was talking very brilliantly.

"Supposing you fell in love with a man who did not care for you?" said the Serpent. "One may outgrow a love that is returned to us, but the love that is withheld from us——" The Serpent paused.

"I shouldn't be so weak and silly as to let myself love anyone who didn't care," said the Princess, with great braveness in her voice, but her hand was suddenly tight clenched beneath the cushion.

"A man may at least have the consolation of struggling to win, even if he fail in the end," said the Serpent; "but a woman must sit still and wait in silence. It is the waiting that saps away so many lives."

"I shouldn't sit still," said the Princess. "I would go round as much as possible, however badly I felt. I would *not* stay at home, and think. But I have too many interests to let one shadow my life altogether. If my heart were broken, I should still feel extremely interested in learning a new crochet pattern."

The Serpent's eyes conveyed a desire for stronger meat than crochet patterns.

"I think the fools are the persons who find no interest in the simple things of life," said the Princess, in distinctly nettled accents. She did not in the least care for the superior attitude which the Serpent occasionally assumed to her.

"Ah, my dear, you have all the gifts of the fairies," said the Serpent, who saw the Princess's expression.

"Oh, no, I haven't," said the Princess, divided between pleasure at the compliment and a passion for

arguing which forced her to contradict it. "Every advantage has a disadvantage attached to it, and *vice versa*, so that we all work out exactly the same, if a clever enough person attack the problem. For instance, I am very clever in my brain, but appallingly silly in my sense—so much so that the admiration and respect which my talents would gain for me are entirely neutralised in people's opinion of me, personally. But, on the other hand, my silliness prevents people from being afraid or envious of me, for the way that I make myself cheap gives the humblest person on this globe an opportunity of good-natured patronage towards me."

"Is that an advantage?" said the Serpent, smoking daintily.

"Oh, yes, for people are always fonder of the people they look down on than the people they have to look up to," said the Princess cheerfully. "For all my assumption of royalty, I really ask very little from people. I only want them to be good-naturedly fond of me; I do not care twopence about their respect or admiration. I do not want them to fear me, or worship. Now, you like to be hated or adored, confess!"

"Temperate likes and dislikes are so monotonous," said the Serpent languidly.

"Not that there is anything particularly temperate or monotonous in my friendships with people," said the Princess thoughtfully. "I supply so much enthusiasm that my friends have to be calm to balance things, or we should do nothing but fall out."

"Play second fiddle, in short," said the Serpent.

"Oh, dear, no," said the Princess. "I'm always quite ready to play second fiddle myself if the har-

mony can be improved thereby. And no one could be more anxious to support the first violin's performance, or more appreciative of its beauty, and more anxious to show it up to advantage than myself. As I like doing everything perfectly, I take an enormous artistic joy in playing second fiddle just as well as it can be done. Now, you like leading an orchestra, or playing a solo all to yourself."

"Well, doesn't everybody?" said the Serpent.

"What I am trying to explain is that *I* really do not attach any preference to any position in social intercourse with people," said the Princess, who was possessed of illimitable patience when engaged in explaining about herself. "I enjoy appreciating people so much, that I believe I enjoy playing second fiddle best of anything. Of course I enjoy appreciating myself, but that is daily bread, so to speak: pleasant, but always there. But I have such a clever brain that it can make the dullest, most unattractive of people seem charming and interesting, if it choose to do so. Though I do not say I have ever met a more critical or piercing brain, if those people offend me," said the Princess darkly.

"You are a perfectly dear little baby," said the Serpent, who was an adept in serpent-talk, and knew what pleased the Princess most of anything.

The Princess stole a suspicious glance at the Serpent, but failed to see the forked tongue in the Serpent's cheek, and accepted the compliment with a satisfied smile.

"You are a very attractive Serpent when you like," said the Princess, which was no news to the Serpent. "But I cannot help smiling when I think of my Aunt pressing your society upon me."

"Your Aunt is one of the women with whom I find a positive pleasure in conversing," said the Serpent. "I can see her good opinion of me rising with every word I speak."

"Yes," said the Princess. "There is one advantage in having an Aunt with views: you always can know how to please her. I gave a girl, with whom I wished to be acquainted, a hint to appear interested in the Education Bill when she came to lunch with us; and my Aunt has asked her up, and is simply delighted to see our friendship grow apace. The girl is a cousin of a Little Lieutenant I know," explained the Princess. "I am acting as their friend and confidante."

"You little *monkey!*" said the Serpent.

"I think I am more impish," said the Princess reflectively, "like the Fairy."

"Who is the Fairy?" said the Serpent.

"The Fairy is the only boy I know with whom I have never flirted," said the Princess. "He is the son of my Fairy Godmother, and attaches no undue value to the unimportant things of life. The Fairy's philosophy of life agrees with mine exactly; but his is a natural philosophy, and mine is one to which I have arrived by dint of thought and study. He is fond of people in a good-tempered way, but he has not so much imagination as I have, so he does not enthuse so much about them. He has an enormous fund of common-sense; but he is a cheerful companion, for he has true natural courage of himself, and his pose is that of a perfect idiot!"

"I should like to meet the Fairy," said the Serpent.

The outdoor bell sounded sharply; a fluttering volley of taps came upon the door.

"Why, it's him!" said the Princess.

"Anyone at home?" twittered a youthful voice, and into the dim-lit room danced the dear little innocent Fairy.

"Here we come gathering cushions in May, cushions in May, cushions in May!" sang the Fairy, as he collected all the cushions from all the chairs on his way to the hearthrug. Then he dropped a graceful curtsy, threw the cushions on the floor, and sank down beside the Princess.

"Most gracious, most worshipful, and most honoured Princess," said the Fairy, "I have an idle hour to kill; and so I told the Knight, when I met him on a flight through Piccadilly this afternoon, that I should flit through his dreams at half-past nine, at which hour he thought his thick head would be in a fit state to receive me. May I trip upon that moonbeam till he arrives?"

"Now perhaps you will allow me to introduce you to the Serpent," said the Princess severely.

"The how much?" said the Fairy. "The—Great Brutus! Oh, really! I am so awfully sorry! I had no idea there was anyone else in the room!" and the Fairy rose and stood, feeling a most awful fool.

"Please sit down on that magnificent collection of cushions," said the Serpent, in the most winning little way imaginable.

The Fairy looked at the Serpent, and discovered she was not an alarming person at all: he may have caught sight of a kindred devil in her eyes. Anyway, he sank down without an apology on to the hearthrug.

"I am so glad to know you," said the Fairy,

in his fresh young voice. "I *did* like *The Right of Expression*. I thought it such a nice little essay."

In the "nice little essay" in question the Serpent had announced her advanced views on the woman question in perhaps the most outspoken language that had ever been employed to an unenlightened public. Critics had foamed; matrons had shuddered; animated controversies had raged, to which every sort of person, from members of the medical profession to merely married men, had contributed; and now the Fairy, with an ingenuous simplicity whose sincerity was obvious, sat on the hearthrug and summed it up as a "nice little essay."

"He means it!" said the Princess, as she met the Serpent's astonished eyes. "He never is shocked at anything, because he is so sweet-minded. He is the dearest little thing I know." And the Princess patted the Fairy's beautifully brushed and elegantly waving hair.

"Rather!" said the Fairy, who was six feet, and broad in proportion. "But you must not analyse me in your essays—I should be so shy!"

"You are a silly boy!" said the Princess.

"Well, you needn't tell the Serpent so," said the Fairy, in a reproachful aside. "Let me tell you that our friends won't help us to preserve our dignity if we don't help ourselves. Giving me away before a Serpent!"

"Oh, go and play the graphophone!" said the Princess.

The Fairy obeyed with alacrity. Truth to tell, the graphophone was the magnet that drew him almost daily to the Princess. The graphophone was the

latest unpaid-for trophy the Princess had wrested from a rather unwilling Graphophone Company, whose representative called weekly to know if the Princess were satisfied yet with her trial of their instrument, while each week the plausible Princess found some new excuse for extending the trial of the entertaining machine. In time the Princess had vague hopes that she could inveigle the Graphophone Company into instituting law proceedings, when she knew her Aunt would interpose, leaving the Princess in a chastened frame of mind, but with a paid-for graphophone. If this conduct seems immoral to the censorious reader, I may say that the Aunt was so wealthy that she would give five pounds at a time to a charity and think nothing of it, while the poor Princess's allowance barely reached three figures. Still, as the Aunt had been known to return articles ere now to indignant trades-people, and the advent of the graphophone had been hardly hailed with joy by the bishop who occupied the flat overhead, the Princess and the Fairy made haste to make music while the graphophone was with them.

"Try Chopin's Funeral March, and I'll pick it out on the piano, if you'll go slowly till I find the key," said the Princess, and began forthwith a lugubrious dirge with one finger while the Fairy made even still more horrible whirring noises on the harmless little graphophone.

"For heaven's sake, stop!" said the acutely sensitive Serpent, who possessed an ear.

"Doesn't like classical music," said the Princess temperately. "Try 'The Ragtime Girl.' By the bye, they have that on the Pianotist. I am trying to get a Pianotist here. I have called twice, and given

my Aunt's bankers as a reference; but they are such suspicious people. However, I am going to-morrow to tell them how conservative my Aunt is, and how she will not believe an instrument can play the piano so beautifully; and if they would only send one up on appro, I am sure my Aunt——"

Here the Fairy leant helplessly against the piano and cried with laughter.

"I am often sorry for your Aunt," said the Serpent; "but I did not realise before what she has to suffer!"

"I am going to play 'Dolly Gray,'" said the Princess, winding up the graphophone energetically. "Dickie can do a cake-walk to it!"

The Serpent rose.

"Going?" said the Princess.

Something whirred and burst with a loud report.

"Good gracious! The thing's gone wrong. Now I shall have to take it to pieces," said the Princess, who was possessed of the erroneous idea that she had a mechanical mind. And she began to be very busy indeed, while the Serpent breathed a thankful sigh and sat down again.

"What is my part to be in *The Fairy on the Blue-bell* play?" said the Fairy, sitting down by the sofa, for he was not possessed of the Princess's passion for work.

"You shall flit through the scene, waving my wand, averting my evil spell," said the Serpent.

"Oh, mayn't I be under the spell?" said the Fairy, wriggling off his cushions, and using his beautiful dark-blue eyes with judicious effect as he approached the Serpent.

"I hope I'm not interrupting," said the Knight

abruptly, and into the room strode that tall young gentleman.

"You are spoiling a most beautiful passage," said the Fairy resentfully. "A love-scene of unequalled touchingness was about to burst upon the world, when your great boots tramped in and squashed it flat. Now the sweet little Fairy is shy. The crystal dew-drop of his love is dried up, like me. Oh, may I?" said the Fairy, whose artless change of position had brought him curiously near the little table which stood by the Serpent's elbow.

"You are an ass!" said the Knight; and sat down by the Serpent, and asked her if she would care to express herself by accepting his escort to the Carlton to-morrow, while the Fairy poured out a foaming glass and sat at her feet and toasted her with fervour.

"I want to go to the Carlton," said the Princess, who was not taken quite so much notice of when the Serpent was in the room.

"You shall go there next week, perhaps," said the Knight, in an offensively brotherly manner; and the Princess tossed her head and left the graphophone a mass of helpless little pieces.

"I'm afraid I am dining there to-morrow with someone else," said the Serpent, as she rose with a gentle sinuous movement of her lacy tail.

"You will see me on a palm leaf if you keep a sharp look-out," said the Fairy. "But don't say you are going to leave us now! Oh, stay and dance with me upon the sward!" And the Fairy attempted to valse on one toe, and nearly fell over the Knight.

The Serpent expressed her regret at leaving the Fairy to revel alone, but remained obdurate.

"I'll see you home," said the Knight.

"There's no need for you to trouble yourself, dear old chap," said the Fairy, whose favourite game was that of an intense affection for the Knight. "I promised my mater I would be home early, so I must fly back to my cobweb on yon twinkling star. The Serpent can share my moonbeam. I'll waft her home *en route*."

So the Serpent kissed the Princess, and bestowed a cruel glance of mockery upon the Knight. The Fairy paused in the doorway and waved a kiss to his crestfallen friend, and the Princess sat on the ottoman and laughed a scornful laugh.

"Serves you jolly well right!" said the Princess. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Wanting to dine with the Serpent, indeed!"

"My dear girl, I cannot see the harm of wishing to enjoy a brilliant woman's society occasionally," said the Knight.

"Should you tell the Tailor-made Girl if the Serpent had dined with you?" said the Princess crushingly.

The Knight was discreetly silent.

"She would be shocked out of her pink and white skin," said the Princess. "And she would be quite right in disapproving of your conduct. You enjoy being seen with the Serpent because she's a celebrity and smart. I do not say you are not also amused and attracted by her, but vanity is at the root of your ostentatious devotion to her. I amuse you just as much, but you do not invite me to dine with you at the Carlton."

"I asked you to come next week," said the Knight.

"And I have declined with scorn and contumely," said the Princess, beating the ottoman with a vicious

hand. "You are perfectly horrid to me since you have fallen in love with the Tailor-made Girl!"

"Oh, rot!" said the Knight, but his voice was rather guilty.

"If the Tailor-made Girl doesn't like me," said the Princess, "I still think it's very mean to let her prejudice you against me. I may not show to advantage beside her, but you have always known my faults——"

The Princess broke off suddenly. The Knight smoked on in an embarrassed silence.

"Not that I care!" said the Princess, with a defiant glare at the shining embers. "I see all your faults too; and if I go on liking you after you have left off liking me, it simply shows that I have a better nature than yours. I don't care what you think of me!"

"I believe you know exactly what I think of you, and what I have always thought," said the Knight.

"I hate being snubbed before other women. What is the use of liking a person if you humiliate her before the world?" said the Princess.

"I mayn't want people to know I'm a slave," said the Knight.

"In the firelight!" said the Princess, with a toss of her head. "You are going to marry the Tailor-made Girl, and I always knew it!"

"I've learnt from your philosophy, you see," said the Knight. "I am going to take the possible happiness that lies within my reach, instead of——"

"You'd never be happy with me, of course," said the Princess; "but oh, I do want to be first! I don't mind your loving her one bit, I want you to be happy,

but I must keep your Princess! You must like me best in your heart!"

"That's not quite fair to her—is it?" said the Knight. "Or to me?"

"I shall have to let you out of my kingdom, then," said the Princess. "My own Knight! Well, I don't care!"

"I know you don't," said the Knight.

"Seems as if it's not such an easy thing to be a Princess as I thought," said the Princess to the fire. "The people are leaving my kingdom on every side. Oh, I don't care! Go and tramp with your Tailor-made Girl; but you can call in now and then and bring her with you. She's not a bad sort!"

The Princess hesitated; then she stretched out her hand.

"Pals?" said the Princess, with rather an uncertain smile.

The Knight looked down at the Princess; then he released her hand very gently. The Knight had broken his lance in two, and laid down his shield at the Princess's feet.

"Serve her as faithfully as you have served me," said the Princess in her heart; but she did not say this aloud, because the Knight was not an emotional person, and it would have embarrassed him fearfully.

"When did you say you are going to stay with the Tailor-made Girl again?" said the Princess at last, in a casual voice.

"In a fortnight," said the Knight. "By the bye, I ran against that cousin of hers, the Quiet Man. He had just come home."

There was a moment's pause.

"I hear he's engaged," said the Knight.

"Engaged, did you say?" said the Princess.

"Yes," said the Knight. "To a daughter of the Governor of Uganda. I hear he came over with her and her mother on the boat. I suppose, now the Quiet Man's come into his estate, he thinks he ought to marry."

"You're sure it's quite true—about the engagement?" said the Princess, looking at the fire.

"Oh, yes; I heard it at the club," said the Knight.

"As a matter of fact, I told him I'd heard he was coming home to settle down; and he said it wasn't quite fixed up yet, but there was no harm in congratulating him. Funny chap!" The Knight smoked on reflectively. "He asked after you."

"After me?" said the Princess.

"Yes," said the Knight. "He said there was some hitch at his lawyer's, and he had to go straight down to Hampshire this afternoon, or he should have called to see you. Wasn't that queer? They say he has no friends. Still, it was funny his thinking of looking you up so soon!"

The Princess did not speak.

"He looked jolly ill, I thought," said the Knight, tapping his pipe against the tray. "The climate seems to have pulled him down a goodish bit."

"It is a horrid climate, isn't it?" the Princess heard herself remarking.

"Tired?" said the Knight.

"Just a little," said the Princess. "The Fairy's been making me laugh so. He is such an idiot!"

The Princess rose.

"I almost think I shall go to bed," said the Princess.

"How white the moonlight makes you look!" said the Knight.

"Good gracious! you aren't going to start an imagination, are you?" said the Princess. "You mustn't do that. You must keep just the same—just my dear old Knight! Oh, but you aren't my Knight now!" The Princess had raised her face unconsciously as she stood at the door with the Knight. The Knight had drawn away a little.

"Oh, dear!" said the Princess, "I beg your pardon for forgetting. Of course my kingdom is empty now, and I'm all alone in it. It's such a funny feeling. However, I don't care! Good-night!"

The Princess nodded to the Knight in a careless way, and left the room. The Knight heard her singing a music-hall song in a vulgar and piercing voice as she went down the passage. It ended suddenly with the sound of the locking of the Princess's door.

Then the Knight sat down in front of the fire, and turned to the thought of the maidenly, sensible, and ladylike Tailor-made Girl with distinct and definite feelings of relief.

XVI.

THE SLAVE.

MY darling girl, you always look pretty!" said the Slave.
"That's a lie!" said the Princess, who was not inclined to mince matters to-day.

"As long as you have your eyes, you will always look prettier than any woman in the world," said the polite but untruthful Slave.

"Another lie," said the Princess, "and a stupid one. I look forty if I look a day old at this moment. I have no colour at all; there are deep black circles round my eyes; my hat does not suit me; I purposely put on my most hideous frock; and I appear exactly as I feel—a cross-tempered, unattractive, grumpy little idiot!"

Then the Princess pulled round her chair with a vicious swing, and sat with her back to the looking-glass.

"Why don't you speak the truth occasionally, for a change?" inquired the Princess.

"My own dear girl, tell me what I am to say, and I'll say it!" said the obedient Slave.

"Say I look forty," said the Princess.

"I shan't," said the Slave, who had learned one or two things during his long-ended engagement to the Princess.

"I'm not in the mood for hypocrisy this after-

noon," said the Princess, with an abstracted and haughty manner. "I can't think why I came here to tea with you. I must have had a slight stroke."

"The idea was that you had not seen me for more than three months," said the Slave humbly.

"Then why meet me here?" said the Princess. "Of all objectionable places, the Histerion is the most low, disgusting, and objectionable. Every other woman in the place is an actress!"

"Why did you choose a *matinee* day?" said the Slave.

"Because Wednesday was the only day that suited me," snapped the Princess. "As you ought to know, it is my Aunt's committee day. If you think she would allow me to have tea with you at the Histerion by myself—or with a chaperon, for that matter—you are very much mistaken. My Aunt at least has some sense of the ordinary decencies of life. She would have a fit if she saw me here alone with you, and quite rightly, too. It is not a proper place to bring me to, and you have no business to encourage me to meet you about town. If you had any regard for my reputation, you would not do it. You simply think of your own amusement, and it never enters your head to reflect you are blackening my character. Imagine bringing a girl whom you respected, and whose family have received you at their house, into a haunt like this!" said the Princess, gazing round the eminently respectable and almost deserted restaurant. "I cannot understand what pleasure you can find in frequenting such *haunts*," said the Princess, who liked this word, and took a melancholy pleasure in repeating it.

"My dear girl," said the Slave, with the wonder-

ful self-control that can only be acquired with years of patient training, "you have always said you liked the Histerion better than any place you know; and to-day, when I suggested we should do a Bond Street shop, you said the Histerion was the only place in London where they had comfortable chairs. Do be consistent, if it's only for two minutes together."

"I shan't, if I don't want to!" said the Princess perversely. Then she caught sight of the Slave's harassed face, and laughed in spite of herself.

"You're rather horrid to-day, aren't you?" said the Slave.

"Yes, I'm in a horrid mood," agreed the Princess. "Never mind. I'll come out of it now, if you'll promise not to irritate me. What nice little cakes! How's the world been treating you?"

"Rottenly, as usual," said the Slave, who was a master in the noble art of pessimism.

"I don't care much for the world, either, to-day," said the Princess. "Now I wonder if listening to your troubles will make me stop thinking of mine, or would I rather complain about mine to you. Which would you like best?" The Princess propounded her question with about as much interest as if she were proffering the cakes.

"I always like you to talk about yourself," said the Slave.

"Now isn't that funny?" said the Princess, resting her chin on her clasped hands and studying the Slave absently. "And I am not in the least interested in listening to you, or even in talking to you!"

"So you've said once or twice before," said the Slave, with a miserable smile.

"Oh, my darling boy!" said the Princess, with a

start and rush of remorse. "I simply had forgotten you were listening. I am a selfish, inconsiderate little beast. As a matter of fact, you are the only person in the world I could bear to have with me at the present moment, and the mere fact of being with you is a comfort!"

The Slave somehow took care of the Princess's hand protectingly under the tablecloth.

"You are a very nice little boy," said the Princess, looking at the Slave with wistful eyes. The Slave had the clear-cut profile of a Sir Galahad and the restless eyes and haggard lines of a Sir Lancelot, which the Princess and other women found a deeply interesting combination.

"An awful nice little boy," said the Princess, with a sigh. "And I like my pin on that tie. You should always wear blue; it matches your eyes."

The Slave made a private and secret note to order a dozen blue ties that evening.

"You are quite sure you still like me better than anyone in the world?" said the Princess, releasing her hand, as she had just espied a tart with chocolate on it.

"Aren't you getting tired of hearing me answer that? I shall have to vary the answer some day," said the Slave, looking at the Princess with a twinkle of wickedness.

"You are in love with somebody else! Who is it, and how dare you?" said the Princess fiercely.

The Slave repossessed himself of the Princess's hand and looked at her in silence.

"Oh, don't love anyone else!" said the Princess; "I simply could not spare you, not just now, anyway!"

"I shall always be here, little person," said the Slave.

"Oh, what is the use of pretending?" said a miserable-eyed Princess, and pulled away her hand. "It is no use at all."

"I'm not pretending," said the Slave.

"But I am," said the Princess, with a wretched laugh. "I'd give two hundred pounds if I could make myself believe I were in love with you. Do you remember when we were engaged? Oh, dear, dear, dear, what a silly mistake that engagement was!"

"The silly mistake was in breaking it off," said the Slave, who was one of those fortunate people who always long for what they never can have. Now, the Slave imagined he was pleasing the Princess by this remark. He had never understood the Princess for one single minute.

"Oh, for goodness sake don't let's begin all that again!" said the Princess recklessly. "I really must keep *one* friend among you all! It's much nicer being pals, you know it is! Don't deceive yourself into imagining you want that wretched time of quarrelling back again!"

"You used to beg my pardon sometimes," said the Slave, looking at the Princess's wistful eyes.

"Oh, well, I should never do that now," said the Princess curtly. "I'm older and more set in my ways," and she ate up the chocolate tart.

"You are exactly one thousand times nicer and prettier than you have ever been in the whole of your life before," said the Slave.

"I hate people who stare at me when I'm eating," said the Princess. "Don't look at me like that. It's

bad form. Remember also you are in a public place, and I am not a trashy little chorus girl!"

"Where am I to look, if I mayn't look at you?" said the Slave, rather shortly.

"At your plate," said the Princess savagely. "Eat up your cake and behave! That yellow-haired creature at the next table is staring at you as if you were a dancing monkey!"

"It's you she is staring at," said the Slave, stung out of all courtesy by the Princess's candour. "She's never taken her eyes off you since she sat down at that table."

"Perhaps you will hint next that I know her?" said the Princess, with a toss of her head.

"I assure you *I* don't!" said the Slave.

"Why yellow hair was ever supposed to be pretty or becoming I have never been able to discover," said the Princess. "That particular shade of lemon yellow would kill any average complexion, and the complexion of an actress is usually not even average. A yellow as yellow as that is an eyesore. I can see nothing else but that woman's yellow hair. It is getting on my nerves. I shall simply have to call up a waiter and ask him to put a table-napkin over it."

"My dearest girl, the woman can't help the colour of her hair. Anyone can see that is a natural golden," said the Slave, who had a secret if vulgar penchant for the colour in question.

"Well, she can cut it off, can't she, and wear a wig?" snapped the Princess. "I don't see that that's any excuse for her. We all ought to try and hide our defects for the sake of our unfortunate fellow creatures who have to see us."

The Slave abandoned any foolish attempt to

soothe the Princess's feelings on such a poignant subject.

"How is the Knight?" said the Slave. "I've not seen him since Henley."

"The Knight is staying at the house of the Tailor-made Girl, to whom his engagement was formally announced yesterday," said the Princess.

"No!!!!" said the Slave.

"How silly to say 'No!!!' like that!" said the Princess. "There's nothing extraordinary in getting engaged. You've done it yourself."

"Poor old Knight," said the Slave, with heartfelt sympathy.

"You are positively insulting in your rudeness," said the Princess, with blazing eyes. "How dare you pity him for being engaged? You are simply jealous of his happiness, you mean, small-minded, pettifogging worm!"

"For goodness sake, don't speak so loud!" implored the Slave. "Some people are just coming past you!"

"I shall speak exactly as loud as I like," said the Princess, in a whisper. Then she dropped her teaspoon and stared wildly at the opposite table.

The Mountebank and the Prince were greeting the Yellow-haired Lady, while another lady of raven locks, but equally vivid complexion and assured carriage, stood by the Prince. The Yellow-haired Lady was obviously pointing out the Princess to the Mountebank, for he turned and looked at her. Then the Prince looked in his turn, and evinced a shame-faced inclination to greet the Princess.

"Good God! You don't really know those bounders!" said the Slave.

"My dear boy, haven't you learnt by now that Mountebanks always smile at a girl who is tea-ing alone with a man at a restaurant of the character of the Histerion? If you bring a lady to such places, you must expect her to be insulted!" said the Princess, returning the greetings of the Prince and Mountebank with a coldly questioning stare and haughty chin.

The Prince, ever solicitous for the comfort of his fair companions, seemed to be suggesting that the table the Yellow-haired Lady had chosen stood in a draught. The Yellow-haired Lady repudiated his suggestion with a loud and ringing laugh. The Mountebank jocosely forced the Prince into a chair between the ladies, and took a seat himself directly opposite the Princess. Many peals of laughter came from the merry party, of which the Prince was perhaps the least ostentatious in his mirth.

"I am perfectly certain that brute is talking about you," said the Slave. "Look here! Don't you think we had better go?"

"And show them I'm afraid—I mean—aware of their presence?" said the Princess. "What a cowardly coward you are!"

"Hang it all, we can't have a scene here!" said the Slave, who was now a lively crimson. "Just look how that man across the room is staring!"

"Do you mean I am to turn right round and look at him?" said the Princess. "Because I decline to make myself conspicuous, however much you wish me to!"

The Slave writhed.

"For God's sake, let's go!" said he.

"I would not go if that Mountebank threw a cake

at me," said the Princess, with deliberation. "But if you are ashamed of being seen with me, I have no wish to keep you. I can stay here perfectly well by myself!"

"You know I'm only thinking of you, you dear silly little person!" said the Slave.

"Oh, well, I'm quite happy," said the Princess, selecting a cake with histrionic interest.

"You can't enjoy being annoyed by those bounders," said the Slave, casting an uneasy glance at the riotous little company. The Mountebank was now pressing a cigarette upon the Yellow-haired Lady. From the fragments of his conversation which reached them, he appeared to be giving her historical examples of ladies who smoked in public hotels.

"Dearest of Slaves," said the Princess, and she watched the Mountebank's antics with the calm of utter wretchedness, "I am so intensely, hopelessly miserable, that I welcome any distraction that can occupy my thoughts. I do not care if it be a pleasant or unpleasant distraction—in fact, I do not think a pleasant distraction would be any use. I am glad those bounders, as you rightly call them, are insulting me, because their behaviour is making me angry, and that is a change from being only miserable. If I could feel very angry, I should be happier still. But the truth is, I cannot feel even humiliated, because my feelings seem to have died inside me, and their dead bodies weigh down my brain. I do not even care because I look ugly. Now you know how I feel."

"But, my darling girl, what has happened?" said the Slave.

The Princess looked at the Slave for one moment: then she saw his restless eyes glancing uneasily at the

Mountebank's table, and she realised just in time that a Princess could not confide in a Slave.

"It's because the Queen is away," said the not wholly truthful Princess. "She has graciously condescended to make her royal progress through the cities in which the Jester is performing. I had a letter from her to-day, and it has reminded me how much I am missing her. That is why I am depressed," and the Princess began to open a green leather pocket-book, which matched the Princess's long coat, and which the Princess consequently carried about with her everywhere.

"Why on earth don't you have a sensible purse you can put in your pocket?" said the Slave.

"Because I have no pocket," said the Princess, with an Olympian stare. "Also I like to have a receptacle for letters, so that I may carry them about with me, and read them when I wish; also because I bought this coat to match this pocket-book, and I think they look nice together; also because I choose to have this pocket-book. Do you wish to hear any more reasons, or would you like to be quiet for a minute or two and allow me to read you a little bit out of the Queen's letter?"

"Let me see it?" said the Slave, holding out his hand.

"Of all the temeritous impertinence!" said the Princess, quite aghast with haughtiness. "Do you imagine Queens write letters for Slaves to read? Kindly stop talking and keep your place; then possibly I may read you a sentence!"

The Princess slowly took out the letter, and leant back in her chair and read it to herself mournfully. Then she darted a piercing and sudden glance upon

the Slave, and, finding his eyes were fixed upon her in a properly appreciative and attentive manner, she allowed the gloomy atmosphere to lighten slightly.

"I can only read you one sentence near the end," said the Princess, turning over several dainty sheets. "I am not sure that the Queen would care for you to hear even one sentence, but I think it will be good for you to understand what beautiful letters there are in the world, even though you will never write them or receive them. This is the sentence: '*Dear kiddie!*' That is not the beginning of the letter," said the Princess severely, glancing at the Slave. "She is simply making that remark out of affection, in the middle of a page. Will you be quiet, please, and listen?"

The perfectly silent Slave half opened his mouth as if to make an expostulation; then caught sight of the Princess's threatening frown, and shut it promptly.

" '*Dear kiddie,*' " repeated the Princess, " 'I wish you could suddenly appear through that open window, and come in for a lovely long talk. There is quite a nice big chair in the window for me, plenty of cushions for you to sit on and lean up against my knee, lots of time, lots of cigarettes, and lots of things to talk about; but, alas, no Princess!' " The Princess suddenly folded up the letter and scrambled it into her pocket-book. "I simply cannot go on reading it, even to myself," said the Princess. "If I could just see the Queen at this moment, and hear her say '*You silly little sweetie!*' and feel her kisses, I should almost be happy. I could bear my unhappiness anyway, even if I couldn't tell her what was the matter; and I do not think I could tell even her. But the

Queen is so understanding: she would not be curious; she would only just love me. Oh, dear, I do want her so fearfully badly, and she will not be home for a month. I *cannot* see how I am going to live for a whole month!"

"A month soon passes," said the Slave.

"When you say things like that I hate you!" said the Princess; "I simply and quietly hate you! A person who makes that sort of remark and thinks it consoling, must have the brains of a dead chicken!"

"If you will only tell me what to say that can be of any comfort to you, I'll say it," said the Slave.

"You any comfort, you!" said the cruel Princess. "It's like your consummate impertinence to suggest such a thing. You are so cringingly abject, I cannot even find any pleasure in bullying you. It's about as satisfying as kicking a jellyfish!"

"It was a dead chicken a minute ago!" said the Slave, with rather a sore laugh.

"Certainly. In kicking a dead chicken, if you like! Though I do not see that that is an improvement of my metaphor," said the Princess, with a lofty gaze. "A person of my strength would crush a soft little dead chicken as easily as they would squash a jelly-fish. Both substances present about the same resistance."

"My dear girl, what horrid similes you use!" said the Slave.

"Similes!" said the Princess, "Wherever did you pick up that word? I shouldn't have thought you'd ever have heard it, much less known its meaning!"

"You're not very polite," said the Slave, with

another glance at the Mountebank's party, to see what they were doing.

"Polite! I am being as disgustingly rude as I possibly can be!" said the Princess. "I am trying to infuriate you. I want you to lose your temper. I would enjoy it if you suddenly gave me a big punch on my nose. I would respect you then!"

"I like to tease you," said the Slave, whom his friends knew as a strong-willed, energetic man, so much so that the Princess had sometimes uneasy doubts that his submission was as much due to indifference as to a desire for peace at any price.

"My goodness!" said the Princess, "I would give anything in this world to wake you up! I would pour this teapot full of tea all over you now, in public, if I were not perfectly certain you would then hand me the milk-jug and say a smile would be sufficient sugar. Do you know what you are?" said the Princess, suddenly leaning her arms on the table and glaring at the Slave. "You are a pitiful sight!"

The Slave looked instinctively at a neighbouring mirror, and turned to the Princess, reassured.

"Oh, your clothes are right," said the Princess, with horrible scorn, "and your face is nice-looking. It is your soul I am looking at, and your soul is like a piece of wet flannel. It is as depressing and damping. I sit here and insult you as hard as I can, and I know perfectly well that even if I succeeded in rousing you for one minute, I should only have to give one little pretty look, and you would be kneeling at my feet, begging my pardon. Be a man!" said the Princess between her teeth. "If you'd only wake up and come out of your slavehood, I would be so obliged, I would marry you to-morrow! But you are

not a man! You are a little figure made of putty, and when I hit you you bend in the middle, and break, and crumble up into miserable little fragments! Oh, be a man, be a man, be a man!"

"You promised to come out of your horrid mood," said the spirited Slave, wondering if it were worth while to light a cigarette.

"Well, and I did, didn't I?" said the Princess, in a perfect rush of mad fury. "I've gone back into it now, that's all!"

"I suppose nine men out of ten would walk straight off and leave you," said the Slave, deciding that it wasn't.

"Oh, if you would, I would adore you!" said the Princess, and looked imploringly at the Slave to try and see a vestige of independence in his mind; but the Slave only looked at the Mountebank's table uneasily again.

"If it gives you any satisfaction to slang me, however, I don't mind," said the Slave, and there was a distinct and definite twinkle in his eyes, which suggested the real, true reason of the Slave's slavehood; and that was that his sense of humour was so well developed, that he enjoyed the Princess in a bad temper more than in any other mood of hers. "I only want to please you. But do come out of the horrid mood, there's a dear little girl!"

"As I have no intention of coming out of it to-day again," said the Princess, finally abandoning all hope of stirring up the Slave, "I think I might as well be going."

"Wait just half a minute," said the Slave. The Princess hesitated; then placed her pocket-book upon the table and sat down again.

"I believe those Mountebank brutes are going in a minute," said the Slave. "We shall have to pass them if we go now."

"Do you mean you made me sit down for that?" said the Princess, in a blaze of anger. "I never heard such impudence in all my life! Pass them, indeed! I have every intention of passing them, if it's only to show how little I care for them!" And before the wretched Slave could speak the Princess had deliberately left her chair and had reached the Mountebank's table, where she slowly and deliberately paused to fasten her glove.

Then the Princess roused herself with a start from her preoccupation, glanced carelessly at the Mountebank, and fixed her eyes upon the Prince with a puzzled look of recognition, which changed into a blank and wondering stare as the Prince was lured into a bow. The *entr'acte* being now concluded, the Princess collected the Slave with an admonishing glance and swept onward to the door.

"Someone is trying to bow to you," said the Slave, lounging along behind. "You had better look round!"

"If you'll mind your own affairs with half the enthusiasm with which you take care of mine, I should be obliged to you," said the Princess, who remembered this sentence out of a book, and thought it effective and suitable.

"It's the man who was staring at you before," said the Slave. "You'd better look round. He knows that I've seen him and told you. Look! he's getting up!"

"Will you kindly understand it is not my habit to look round at men, strangers or friends," said the

Princess. "I am aware of the usages of ordinary polite society, though you may not be. Besides which, there is no man on this earth whom I have the faintest desire to see, much less trouble to turn my head to look at! Besides which, if the man I wanted to see most in all the world were standing a yard behind me, I would not turn my head to look at him after you had told me to. Kindly remember you are a Slave and I am a Princess," said the Princess, whose perversity at times almost compelled one's respect.

"He's coming up to you," said the Slave, in a nonchalant manner.

"I would not look round at this moment," said the Princess, and turning her head in the direction of the Slave's embarrassed glance, "if you paid me——"

The Princess suddenly stopped. Her eyes fell on the man to whom the Slave had been trying to direct her attention; then, with a queer little gasp, she pushed at the swing door and was through it and out in the lobby on to the steps.

"A hansom at once, please!" said the Princess, and the commissionaire sprang out into the rain.

"What on earth is the matter?" said the Slave, who had received the full force of the door in his surprised young face. "Who's the man? He's standing looking after you as if he had seen a ghost. Good Heavens, how white you are!"

"Will you or will you not stop making foolish jokes?" said the Princess, turning madly on the Slave, in an absolutely quivering condition. "Are you going to call a hansom, or am I to stand here in the rain forever?"

"The hansom is here, miss," said the commission-

aire whom the Princess had commissioned exactly one minute ago.

The Princess pushed past the paralysed Slave and mounted the step of the hansom, while a puzzled commissioner held a basket on the wheel.

"Darling! You must let me come with you! You are ill!" said the Slave.

"I have never been so perfectly well in my life," said the Princess. "Don't be more ridiculous than you can help, because it's boring. I'm going home by myself, because I have rather a lot of shopping to do."

"Why, where's your pocket-book?" said the Slave.

"You don't mean to say you left it on the table?" said the Princess. "How like you!"

"My dear girl——" began the Slave helplessly.

The cabman and commissioner evinced a desire to join the conversation.

"Are you going to fetch it, or do you wish a crowd to collect?" said the Princess, leaning back in the hansom and declining all further responsibility.

"Draw up to the side!" yelled the commissioner to the indignant driver. The Slave made confused remarks to the commissioner, and then his boyish form disappeared into the restaurant again.

"You had better let the Slave come with you," said a white and desperate Princess to an equally white and desperate reflection in the corner of the hansom, "because you have made rather a fool of yourself; and if the Slave ever guessed what was the matter, you would just as soon die at once! Besides which, it will be good for you to buck up and be strong, even if the Slave does irritate you to frenzy. You have got to buck up, do you hear? Buck up!"

The damp and shining streets were full of hurrying people, miserable and dripping, under inadequate umbrellas; the rain came in sudden fierce rushes against the hansom windows.

The Princess pulled herself together and sat up in her corner. The swing doors of the restaurant were opening.

XVII.

THE DRAGON.

“**H**OW do you do?” said the Quiet Man.

“Oh!” said the Princess.

The Quiet Man stood on the pavement by the hansom. His face was very thin and brown, his throat was wrapped up in a great silk muffler, and he wore an enormously long and thick greatcoat. He looked at the Princess with his keen grave eyes, and the Princess could not speak a word.

“Please speak to me,” said the Quiet Man quite humbly.

“Oh, of course! You have been to Uganda!” said the Princess, finding a polite and society tone not so impossible after all. “I almost believe I heard from someone you were back again. Wretched weather, isn’t it? After Africa, you must find it so cold!”

“Dreadfully cold,” said the Quiet Man, looking at the Princess all the time. “Have you nothing to say to me, besides remarks on the weather?”

“Oh, I’m *so* sorry! How rude you must be thinking me! Of course, my cousin told me you were coming back to England to be married!” said the Princess, in an effusive if rather bored manner, and gazing across the shining Circus.

“That was my idea,” said the Quiet Man.

“How quite fearfully rude of me to have forgot-

ten! I suppose I must congratulate you!" said the Princess, watching an omnibus with enormous interest.

"Who else but you should do so?" said the Quiet Man, with a curious twinkle.

"You mean, because we arranged to be a quite especial sort of friends, didn't we? I remember now, we kept up quite a long correspondence. I have so many friends abroad, I'm always forgetting which of them I write to and which I don't. But now I see you again, I remember quite well who you are and all about you," said a desperate haughty Princess, still lost in breathless interest of the omnibus's mazy way.

The Quiet Man said nothing, but continued to gaze on the Princess's face.

"Is your marriage to take place soon?" said the Princess, with a helpless glance towards the swing doors of the restaurant. Would the Slave never come?

"I hope so," said the Quiet Man.

"I hear she is the daughter of the Governor of Uganda," said the Princess, meeting the Quiet Man's eyes unawares and turning a sudden crimson.

"Oh, dear, no!" said the Quiet Man, and the Princess's heart stood still.

"No?" said the Princess in a whisper.

"We have talked quite enough about my affairs," said the Quiet Man. "I have seen your cousin this afternoon, and he says you are not engaged to the Prince."

"The Prince!" said the Princess. "That conceited, fatuous, small-minded, vacillating, bad-tempered boy! What *do* you mean?"

"What did you mean by sending me that letter?" said the Quiet Man.

"It was just a letter," said the Princess feebly, "for fun!"

The Quiet Man did not answer.

"What has it to do with you, anyway?" said the Princess, forgetting to be polite.

The Quiet Man put his foot on the step of the hansom.

"The Slave is coming! It is his hansom! How dare you?" said the Princess, in a sudden rush of happiness and fright. "He will be here in one minute. He has just gone into the restaurant because I left my pocket-book. We are going home together."

"Will you drive along the Embankment," said the Quiet Man to the driver, "till I tell you to stop?"

Then the Quiet Man sat down by the Princess and closed the doors: the hansom window slipped down and shut them in, and the horse began to turn.

"How dare you?" said the Princess, with blazing eyes. "Did you hear what I said?"

"Every word," said the Quiet Man, putting his hand on the Princess's hand in a calm and self-possessed manner.

"Oh, poor, poor Slave! What will he think?" said the Princess, trying not to be happy as hard as she could.

"I really don't care," said the Quiet Man.

"Oh, there he is! He has seen us!" said the Princess.

The Princess had caught a moment's glimpse of the Slave standing in the mud and the rain, with a green

leather pocket-book in his hand and a perfectly blank and startled expression on his face, as he gazed at the Princess's hansom and saw her disappear.

"He always gets left!" said the Princess; and then, with a slide and a swaying of chains, the hansom had slipped over the asphalt and was turning the corner down into the Mall.

"Now will you kindly explain your conduct," said the Quiet Man.

And at that the little devils, who a moment ago the Princess would have said were dead and asleep for ever, began to stir in the Princess's heart; and this most amazing Princess suddenly drew her hand away from the Quiet Man's, and opened her eyes in a coldly surprised manner and said, "I don't understand you! Why should I explain myself to you?"

"Because I command!" said the Quiet Man, looking down with ever such a tender yet amused smile in his eyes; and a long ago forgotten memory suddenly hummed and started to life in the Princess's brain.

"You make it so easy for us to make love to *you*," whispered the memory. That was what the Quiet Man had said to her when they had driven to the station that last morning. "*So easy!*"

"You shall see you are wrong, my dear," said the wicked, perverse, and idiotic Princess to herself. "Easy to win, am I? Well, you shall just see!"

And the Princess returned the look of the Quiet Man with a smile that was so amused and so superior that the Quiet Man's eyes grew suddenly as stern as iron.

"Command?" said the Princess. "What an excellent logical reason! This isn't Uganda, you know!"

"But you are going to obey me, aren't you?" said the Quiet Man, and his voice was not quite so certain as it had been.

"Oh, how I love you for speaking humbly!" said the Princess to herself, in a very ecstasy of happiness and love. But the little devils put their hands over her mouth, and choked back the words that were coming; and the Princess only opened her eyes a little wider, and raised her eyebrows a wee bit higher, and said, still in the same amused and superior voice, "If this is a joke, is it quite in the best of good taste?"

"No, it isn't a joke," said the Quiet Man, speaking very simply, for he was not skilled in histrionic accomplishments, as the Princess was. "I told you I should come back to you when I went away. Now I have come back, sooner than I thought, because my cousin died, and I am not a poor man any longer. But if you were only joking in your letters——" The Quiet Man paused.

"Do you know, I really can't remember what I put in them at all?" said the Princess, with the smile of a dear little seraph. "I write so many, and they're all so much alike, that I mix them all up with each other. So, whether I have quarrelled with you in my letters, or insulted you, or have been affectionate and friendly to you——"

"That's nonsense!" said the Quiet Man, and his eyes began to grow hard. "You know what you wrote to me. You couldn't write letters like that to more than one man. I won't believe so badly of you, even if you tell me it is so."

"You are taking up exactly the right attitude to my idiocy, you are keeping all your dignity, and I

love and admire and respect you more than I ever thought it possible for me to love, admire, and respect anyone on this earth," said the Princess to herself. It was for this reason, for there was no other, that the Princess tossed her head ever so little and allowed the seraphic smile to grow and deepen, while she looked sweetly in the Quiet Man's face and said, "I'm so glad you know so much more about me than I do myself! But I'm afraid your perfectly sweet belief in me will have to be destroyed, for I simply hate people when they become serious. Deep feelings and all that nonsense bore me to death. I enjoy life, you know!"

"You did not mean what you wrote to me," said the Quiet Man, so quietly that the Princess nearly gave in and hid her face against his shoulder. But the little devils were at work within her heart, crying out to her not to "*cave in*," or "*be cheap*," or any of the other terms they knew so well how to use; and the Princess met the gaze of the Quiet Man with the shallowest, prettiest little look, and said, "I'm most fearfully sorry, but I can't remember a single word. If you'll tell me what I wrote——"

"No, I won't tell you," said the Quiet Man. "If you've forgotten—I'm glad you've forgotten!" and he put his hand up through the door of the cab. "Stop, please!" said the Quiet Man to the driver.

"He is going to get out. You have lost him for ever. Tell him you didn't mean it!" cried the Princess's heart. The hansom drew up along the kerbway. The window rattled and shivered, and drew up also.

"I'm sorry if I've taken you out of your way,"

said the Quiet Man. "You want to go home, don't you?"

"Say you're sorry before it's too late!" cried the Princess's heart.

"No, don't. Just show him you're not cheap. You're always asking people to forgive you. Don't be a door-mat for once. Let him do all the asking. He will if he's properly in love," cried the devils.

"Home, please," said the Princess. "So sorry if you're angry. It's rather silly of you, isn't it?"

The Quiet Man did not answer or look at her; if he had done, he would have seen two big tears in the Princess's eyes, tears which I must say she did not wink away.

"Oh, look at me! look, and you'll see, even if I can't tell you!" cried the Princess in her heart; but the Quiet Man was giving directions to the driver; then he raised his hat, and the cab drove forward, and the Princess realised what she had done. Then of course, when it was too late, when the only thing to be done was to accept the situation bravely and go home in silence, the Princess thrust a desperate hand up to the driver, and said in a trembling little voice, "Turn round, please, at once, and go after that gentleman. I—I've forgotten something!"

The hansom turned obediently; they were at the bottom of the crowded Mall: the driver made his way back with dash but difficulty; a dozen times a cart or waggon stopped their progress. The Princess leaned out of the window, with flaming cheeks and a heart of lead, and scanned each passer-by hurrying along beneath umbrellas. But she did not see anyone in the least resembling the figure she was looking for. At the top of the Mall the driver slackened pace, and

inquired in dubious tones which way to turn. Then the Princess knew it was really too late, and there was no chance of finding happiness again that night.

And as she made her melancholy journey homewards, through rain-washed streets and dismal smoke-grimed houses, the Princess laughed a miserable little laugh. "It isn't only the Slave who gets left!" said the Princess. "If I am silly, I do pay for it!"

It was not a very reasonably inclined Princess who entered the formal dining-room; it was, in fact, a very miserable and irritable Princess who threw her hat and coat upon the chair, and sat down forlornly. Only half the lights were on; the fire was nearly out, and smouldered blackly in an untidy grate; and the whole room looked bare and dull and cheerless. The Princess had sat there nearly half an hour before there came the brisk tap of her Aunt at the front door; then, with a rustle of silk and bombazine, the door opened and the Aunt swept in.

"Oh, you *are* back?" said the Aunt, and the Princess heard a danger signal in her tones.

"Did you have a good meeting?" said the Princess hoping against hope that her imagination had deceived her.

"Thank you," said the Aunt, and hope vanished.

The Aunt rustled round the table, saw the Princess's things, and rang the bell. When a maid had appeared and borne off the offending garments to the Princess's room, the Aunt sank down into the arm-chair opposite the Princess and pulled off her gloves with deliberation.

"Who was that man I saw with you in the hansom?" said the Aunt.

"What man?" said the Princess, with blanched cheeks.

"The man I saw get into the hansom in which you were waiting outside the Histerion restaurant," said the Aunt with deadly distinctness.

"The Man from Uganda," said the Princess, almost voiceless. "He stayed with us, you know."

"Oh, the man you drove to the station," said the Aunt, with a slight laugh; and if the Princess had committed an indiscretion in that act, she paid for it in full when she heard her Aunt's unspoken criticism. It is wonderful how much may be expressed in a little laugh. "I asked the Slave, whom I met running after your hansom," continued the Aunt pleasantly, "and he told me the man was a perfect stranger who had been staring at you in the Histerion, where you had been tea-ing. The Slave was about to create a scene by actually calling after you, but I managed to assure him you would be able to take care of yourself, and were doubtless quite used to these chance acquaintances speaking to you."

The Princess preserved a silence, her heart was beating up and down in a curiously jerky fashion.

"May I ask why this Man from Uganda, whose acquaintance with you was surely of the slightest, as far as my knowledge goes, went off with you like that in the hansom?" said the Aunt.

"We know each other well. He's written to me. It was the first time we had met since he had been away," said the Princess.

"Written after three days' acquaintanceship?" said the Aunt. "Is it your habit, then, to write to every man who stays a week-end with us? I merely ask the information."

"He was serious," said the Princess, with one mad desire to defend her shattered pride. "He meant it. He's come back to see me."

"Do you mean he wishes to marry you?" said the Aunt, who did not call a spade a teaspoon.

"No," said the Princess incoherently. "At least—not exactly. He only saw me to-day—for a few minutes——"

"Do you think he is going to ask you?" said the Aunt.

"No!" said the Princess, with sudden rage. "What business is it of yours?"

"Because that is the only excuse I can possibly see for your behaviour; because I would like you to realise where that behaviour is leading you," said the Aunt, and the Princess felt that death would afford a welcome release. "After I had seen you disappear and had quieted the Slave, I went on to the Histerion to tea with Mrs. Otholroyd Booth, as she had kindly invited me to do so, after our meeting. The only unoccupied table was by a group of vulgar, impossible, theatrical people. Distasteful as it was to us to suffer their presence, we hardly liked to leave the restaurant without taking tea, so we were forced to sit at this adjoining table. They were talking and laughing in such a manner that it was impossible to refrain from listening. You can imagine my feelings, perhaps, when I heard your name."

The Aunt paused. The Princess found she was counting the strokes of the clock with mechanical regularity.

"Your name," said the Aunt, in a strangely quiet voice, "coupled with that of a young man whose name Mrs. Otholroyd Booth also recognised, as that

of a scapegrace nephew who has been for some time a source of trouble and anxiety to her, on account of his dissolute ways. Your name was connected with his in such a manner that I had no choice but to make my identity known to the speaker and ask him for an explanation. I did not know such an unspeakable person existed as the—man who answered me.”

Still the Princess did not answer. The deluge had broken and submerged her; she lay supine beneath its weight.

“Now at last we understand why you have welcomed the friendship of the niece of Mrs. Booth,” said the Aunt, elongating herself visibly in her chair above the Princess. “You have been acting as a go-between, we surmise, between this worthless young scamp of a Lieutenant and the niece, who seems to have behaved in as false and dishonourable a manner as yourself. Now I ask you if you have anything to say for yourself!”

“The Prince was at the table also,” said the Princess, hearing herself speak in a voice which she hardly recognised as hers, it was so dull and unimpassioned. “That boy I made friends with at Cookham. Did he bow to you, or speak?”

The Aunt opened her mouth three times, then shut it.

“I wrote to him all the time I was in Cornwall; then I lunched with him when I came up to town for that two days, and he seemed sick of the whole affair; so I gave him up,” said the Princess, talking on mechanically, but noticing the different shades of purple her Aunt’s expressive face was passing under. “The Mountebank is his great friend. I expect they talk me over together with those ladies. Did you

notice the ladies? The yellow-haired one was staying with the Mountebank at Udy; she came into a private room at the hotel, and found me and the Mountebank alone together. I don't think she is married to him," said the Princess, keeping her eyes fixed on her Aunt.

The Aunt put up her hand with the motion of arresting an omnibus.

"I dined with the Poet alone at the Café Véronique," said the Princess, now lost to all common-sense or reason. "I should think that would cause a good deal of comment and scandal. People stared at us rather curiously. He seemed to know a lot of people there. We both behaved rather peculiarly. We stayed till every single person had left the restaurant who had been dining there, and the people were coming in for supper!" and the Princess laughed in a hard and dashing manner. "Not that that is anything to some of the things I have done," said the Princess, casting about in her mind for some still more fearful act that she might relate.

"That is quite enough, thank you," said the Aunt. "I don't know what these young men think of you. Perhaps that never occurs to you?"

"Oh, no; the only thing that I think of is what I think of them," said the Princess, rising defiantly and leaning against her chair. "Woman's rights, you know, Aunt! The equality of the sexes! You've been dinning them into me all my life! I've been carrying them out, you see. What is it the Serpent says? Men are allowed to express themselves! Well, I've expressed myself. Now you see what it ends in. I've snatched my freedom, and used it; and see how happy I am!"

"At least I still have some control of you," said the Aunt, in a trembling voice. "Now I know how we stand, I may be able to make better use of it."

"But what about the freedom which every woman should have by right?" said the Princess, laughing again. "You're forgetting your doctrines, Aunt. Think what you and Mrs. Otholroyd Booth have been shouting out on a platform all this afternoon——"

"Please remember I am your Aunt, and that you owe me some slight respect while you are in my house," said the Aunt, with sudden dignity.

The Princess tried to laugh again, as if she were not at all ashamed of herself.

"As London has this effect on you," said the Aunt, "as you are not to be trusted near society, I must take steps to see that you are removed from temptation. I shall send word down to Mrs. Maltby that we shall take up our residence at Haselbay in the course of the next few days. Cookham is too near town. I do not think your very casual acquaintances will trouble to take a three-hours' railway journey to visit you."

"We are going to Haselbay—in the winter!" gasped the Princess. "We are going away from town!"

"I have not exercised due supervision on your letters up till now," said the Aunt, "but now I shall see that you hold no communication with any of your indiscriminate correspondents. I have allowed you a certain amount of freedom, because, as you say, my doctrines led me to believe that freedom was good for all. Carrying out that principle, I have allowed you to correspond with your friends with no restraints nor questions; I have allowed you to visit certain friends,

alone; I have allowed you to ask your friends to stay with you—to, in short, gratify every reasonable desire for society which I considered harmless. But there are exceptions to every rule. With you, freedom degenerates into license. Now we will see what control and solitude can do for you!”

Then the Aunt made a stately exit from the room.

“You have made rather a mess of it, my dear,” said a still stunned Princess to herself. “You will never see the Quiet Man again; you can’t even write to him. And you have brought it all on your own head. If it is any consolation to you, you can think you have richly deserved it! But there is no use denying the fact that the Dragon has won!”

XVIII.

THE KING.

“**T**HERE are compensations even in a prison-like existence,” said the Princess. “If I have no excitements, I have no reactions. If I am not allowed to do anything I want to do, I can commit no indiscretions, to repent of. And as I could not be really happy anyhow now, I can be more pleasantly miserable alone here, with only the sea and the sandhills for company, than anywhere else in the world. Altogether, as things have happened as they have, perhaps the present state of things is the best that could exist for me!” and the Princess sighed a sigh that she tried to think was philosophical.

The waves surged and broke soothingly along the sands: the Princess sat on the sandhills, and the Knight leaned on his elbow beside her, and dug caves in the soft, damp, crumbling sand with his hand. A great tussock of grass made a cushion for the Princess’s head to lean against. It was a still, warm April night, when all the air was whispering of spring; there was a pale green light in the evening sky on the horizon, and a few faint stars peeped out. The moon had not yet risen, and the sea and sandhills were all grey and shadowy.

“I wonder if you’d be very angry with me——” said the Knight, and interrupted himself in his funny, brusque way. Then he dug more caves, and stared

down into them. He had not looked at the Princess once since they had come on to the sandhills.

"Fearfully, if you're going to say anything about years of discretion," said the Princess wearily. "Mind you, although force of circumstances has made me a pattern Princess for three whole months, I do not believe my real nature has changed at all; and I am perfectly certain the simple transit of time will never affect it. I know there is a popular idea, which you and my Aunt share, to the effect that when a girl has passed her twenty-first birthday, she must pick up her skirts and tip-toe her way judiciously through the fringe of the ocean of emotion, with a neat little compass of common-sense in her hand and a patent electric torch of experience to flash on the ocean. Her aim is to keep her skirts clean and her feet daintily dry, and this is called being sensible. Well, you see, a child never will learn from experience, but rushes into the ocean headlong and gets very wet, no doubt, and receives a good many slaps in the face from the waves, and sinks into a quicksand where it thinks it is safest and altogether has a very stormy time; for this reason its parents and guardians watch over it continually, and are always running after it, and pulling it back by the scruff of its neck, and shaking it and smacking it. Mind you, I do not say that child has a peaceful time; but it has an eventful one. And if it gets overwhelmed and submerged now and then," said the Princess, warming to her subject, "think of the joys of changing one's feelings; think of the happiness of rest in the steady comfortable warmth of friendship!" (and here the Princess slipped her hand through the arm of the Knight) "And when one is rested, oh, think how strong and

eager one feels for the next douche!" and the Princess threw back her head and drank in the sea breeze.

"My goodness! When I am once let out again!"

"You are a caution!" said the Knight. "You do reason everything out so. Of course I know that you're miserable really——"

"I'm not sure that I am," said the Princess. "I suppose you're referring to what I told you—the other night——"

"Do you mean to say *that* was acting?" said the Knight, and he looked at the Princess at last.

If the Princess had not been so engaged in disentangling her own thoughts, she would have seen in a flash that something had happened, for the Knight's face was a perfect picture of horror. But the Princess was lost in a maze of metaphysics, and pulled a blade of grass between her lips, and bit it meditatively as she gazed at the silent shadowy skies and sea.

"You mean about the Quiet Man," said the Princess. "Do you know, I am becoming resigned to even that. In fact, I'm not sure that it isn't best after all. For I cannot help quarrelling with every single person I am thrown with, and the more interested I am in them, the more delight I have in trying on new emotions with them. If anyone understood me it would be all right, but I do not think the Quiet Man ever could understand; he is so different from me. I should hate anyone, of course, who was like me. The Poet is like me. The Prince is a little like me. Well, I could never be in the least in love with them, but they would understand me exactly," said the Princess, concluding her repast on the blade of grass. "But I love the Quiet Man just because he is so simple, and so elemental, and so strong; and it is for

those reasons that he could never understand how a person can be sincere and insincere, and reasonable and extravagant, and emotional and philosophical, all mixed up together and at once. I should do nothing but break his heart and my own; and yet if he once understood I really, really cared, and took no notice of my silly fits, but told me to stop making a fool of myself, I should give in as weakly as the most ordinary feminine person on this earth. But that never will happen. Oh, dear, I'm so miserable!" said the Princess, and buried her face in the tussock of grass, which pricked her face atrociously.

"I'll be hanged if I can understand you!" said the Knight. "A minute ago everything seemed plain sailing, but you confuse one so. Look here, will you answer a plain question?"

"Oh, what's the use of talking?" said the Princess, coming out of her tussock of grass, however. "I talk, I talk, and I talk, and it all comes back to the one thing: that nothing in this world is worth anything really without——"

"The Quiet Man!" said the Knight, with a delighted shout.

The Princess stole a savage glance at him.

"Without philosophy," said the Princess; but, alas for philosophy's votary! a big tear trickled down the Princess's face.

"Oh, don't cry, old girl!" said the Knight. "Look here. I've done something awful. I don't know what you'll say!"

"You haven't dared——" said the Princess.

"Yes, I have!" said the Knight.

"You've written?" said the Princess.

The Knight looked at the sea.

"You have! You have!" said the Princess, with a sudden fierce grasp of the Knight's coat-sleeve. "Oh, I'll never forgive you if you have. You great fatuous, blundering, meddlesome, dishonourable——"

"What do you mean?" said the Knight.

"I gave you my confidence," said the Princess, and her voice was absolutely trembling with anger, "and this is how you abuse it! Oh, you're exactly like your mother! You've just about as much delicacy! What have you said? What have you dared to say?"

The Princess shook the Knight by his shoulder.

"I'm not going to tell you," said the Knight, hurt in more senses than one, and trying to wriggle out of the infuriated grasp of the Princess.

"I could kill you!" said the Princess. "If I'd thought for a single minute you'd have been such an interfering, disloyal, treacherous sneak, I'd have confided in your mother first! I knew you were a fool, but I thought you had some vestige of honour left!"

"My dear girl, you've been eating your heart out here for the last three months, and I wanted to help you," said the Knight, rising at last and standing up very stiffly against the sky-line.

"Then why didn't you ask my permission?" said the Princess, grasping the sand, now that the Knight's coat-sleeve was removed from her.

"I didn't say anything about it, because I was afraid you'd be disappointed if he——" said the Knight.

"It's too humiliating even to think about," said the Princess. "Good heavens! I did think I might tell *you* about it; I didn't think that was an indiscre-

tion! I didn't think I should have to pay for that so heavily!"

"My dear girl——" said the Knight.

"Oh, will you go?" said the Princess. "Don't crown it all by apologising! If it's any comfort to you, you may know you have cured me once and for all of being indiscreet!"

Then the Princess turned her back on the Knight and buried her face again in the unpleasant, scratchy tussock; and the Knight hesitated a moment, and then turned on his heels and swung off along the sandhills till his tall young figure disappeared into the shadows. And I do not know which of those two young people was most miserable.

"Oh, I'd planned to meet him years after," said the Princess to the unsympathetic grass spikes. "I had planned we should meet again. And now the Knight's spoilt everything. Oh, what has he said? What has he said?"

The Princess lifted her head with a miserable little sob, the grass was so very prickly. The sea was coming nearer and nearer, and each wave lapped up the sand and overtook the line of foam with a triumphant soaking swish. The moon was rising slowly over the distant sandhills. Even in the midst of all her wretchedness, the Princess couldn't help a moment's thrill of happiness in the silence and the beauty of the evening.

"Oh, dear, it will so soon be high tide!" said the Princess. "Then the waves will begin to sink back, and it won't be interesting to watch them any longer. I wonder why it is so interesting watching the tide come in? We know it never will come *much* farther than high-water mark, yet there's always the feeling

that it may. Now I wonder will it come over those stones to-night?" The Princess raised herself and sat up. The stones shone placidly in the moonlight, a little space away from her, down the shingle. "Oh, I do want it to come over those stones!" said the Princess, forgetting the existence of Knight and Quiet Man alike for the moment. "I wish the Knight were here, so that I could have a bet on it. Oh, what a beast I was to him! Never mind! I can apologise to-morrow. Oh, that wave will do it! No, it won't!"

The Princess's eyes were shining, her cheeks were rosy with excitement.

"It will, it won't! It will, it won't! Hurrah! It's coming!" said the Princess aloud, as the last wave rose and trembled, and fell.

"What a baby you are!" said the Quiet Man.

"Good gracious!" said the Princess.

"I have been standing here for almost a minute," said the Quiet Man.

"I'm so sorry," said the Princess, looking about for the armour of politeness and self-control she had dropped in that first glad moment.

"I have learnt quite a great deal about you in that minute," said the Quiet Man, looking down at the Princess. "Don't let's misunderstand each other any more. It isn't worth it!" And he sat down beside the Princess on her throne of sand.

"I never knew the Knight had written. I was fearfully angry with him. We've just had a fearful quarrel. I sent him away!" said the Princess, and the words came out in a rush.

"I've just met him," said the Quiet Man. "I had

his letter this afternoon, and I came off by the next train. Wasn't that absurd of me?"

"He had no business to write," said the Princess. "I was furious!"

"He has just told me so," said the Quiet Man. "He advised me not to come." The Quiet Man possessed himself of the Princess's hand. "He gave me the impression your heart was breaking. Have you really been miserable at all, I wonder!"

"Horribly," said the Princess, who was always unexpected. "My Aunt stopped all my letters. She actually opened and read one I had written to you! Have you really come to take me away?"

"Oh, why were you so silly when I came before?" said the Quiet Man.

"I made the hansom turn round; we went up to the top of the Mall. I never was so wretched in all my life," said the Princess.

"Shall I ever understand you?" said the Quiet Man.

"Oh, do try!" said the Princess.

"I believe you are the easiest person in the world to manage," said the Quiet Man.

"Though mind," said the Princess, "I happen to be in a very giving-in mood just now, but you needn't flatter yourself it will last."

"All right," said the Quiet Man. "We'll always quarrel, shall we, to the end of our lives? I'll always command, and you'll always rebel, and give in?"

"You are getting too confident," said the Princess. "I think it is time now to humble your pride."

"I know perfectly well what you have been wanting to say ever since I came up," said the Quiet Man.

"You have wanted to let me know that if I had not come, you would have completely recovered in time!"

"Well, I should!" said the Princess defiantly. "I have not been so frightfully unhappy, even though I have been all alone all day for so long. And my Aunt could not have kept me here forever, for next year I shall be old enough to come out of Chancery and enter into a little income of my own; and then I should have had a very good time. I think you ought to know this, because I do not want to deceive you more than I can help, and also because I do not want you to grow conceited or proud."

"Then," said the Quiet Man, "I shall go away again, for that sort of love is no use to me at all. If you're not prepared to lay down your independence, Princess——"

"Oh, I am!" said the Princess. "I was only showing off, upon my solemn honour. I *do* care!"

"Enough to obey?" said the Quiet Man, suddenly throwing off his disguise. And there, in all his majesty and power, stood the King.

"Oh, dear," said the Princess, "I had planned it all so differently. I thought I could run about in the dust of the highways for as long as I liked, but directly I heard you coming, I could slip back on the throne and be seated there, so grand and dignified, when you came up. And then I had planned you should bow down most fearfully humbly, and after I had kept you waiting on your knees for years, I would graciously extend one finger. But now you have come on me in the dust, and you have seen I am only a beggar Princess; and it is no use my putting on airs and trying to impress you now, because you have heard from the Knight——"

Here the Princess hid her face against the Quiet Man's shoulder.

"Fearful disappointment, life!" said the Princess.

"You humbug!" said the King. "Why, you turned me away from the throne. You wouldn't let me even approach it!"

"It's no use your trying to comfort me," said the Princess, feeling very comforted all the same. "I am only an ordinary person, after all."

"You are not to think about yourself so much," said the King. "It's a bad habit."

So the Princess gave up thinking about herself.

"Still, you must let me think of a few other people besides yourself," said the Princess. "I must think about the people in my kingdom just a little. Do you know, I am going to extend a general amnesty to everybody in it, even the Mountebank!"

"You will never speak to the Mountebank again," said the King. "Your letter about that scene at Udy kept me awake for nights and nights. Do you know, your imprudence at times almost amounts to a fault!"

"Isn't it funny?" said the Princess. "Directly after I have committed an indiscretion, no one can see its idiocy and folly better than myself. And yet it never seems foolish till after I have done it!"

"You really must grow up!" said the King.

"My silliness makes my friends think about me and discuss me a good deal," said the Princess sweetly. "I like to be in my friends' thoughts. And when people trouble to *think* about my indiscretions, they must see they only proceed from a love of excitement and adventure. I really have a good mind to write a defence of all my indiscretions; it would make such

a curious and interesting book. And then when people misjudged me I could send them a copy."

"If you repented your indiscretions for rather longer, and defended them rather less, you would be a wiser Princess," said the King.

"If a defence were printed once for all, it would save me the trouble of writing so many explaining letters," said the Princess.

"That would be a good thing," said the King. "Do you know, you write the most amazingly foolish letters in the world!"

"I'll never write to you again," said a smarting Princess.

"You shall never write to anyone else!" said the King, and meant it.

"I shall write to whomever I like, once I'm let out of this gaol," said the Princess, with a toss of her head. "I shall write letters to the Poet."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said the King.

"I shall write them as exercises. He is my master, you know," said the Princess, giving rather a wicked little look at the King.

"I am your master now," said the King.

"I see we are going to have a pretty interesting time of it," said the Princess.

"I am perfectly sure of it," said the King. "But, all the same, you will not write letters to the Poet."

"I shall write to the Queen, whatever you say," said the Princess, abandoning the Poet, but with a mental reservation.

"Shall I tell you a great secret?" said the King.

"If you wish it to be repeated," said the Princess, pulling at the stiff and spiky grass till a long piece came away in her hand.

"Would you like to know the only person of whom I have ever really been jealous?" said the King.

"I couldn't help being fond of the Prince if I saw him again, he's such a dear," said the Princess, enjoying the grass very much indeed.

"Oh, the Prince doesn't count," said the King. "No, the person I am jealous of is—the Queen!"

"You can be as jealous as you like," said the Princess, biting the grass with cruel decision, "but I never will give up loving the Queen."

"Better than me?" said the King.

"Better than anyone," said the Princess, eating the grass right up, stalk and all, like a rabbit.

"You are making me horribly jealous, because I believe it is true," said the King.

The Princess peeped out of her eyes, and rather liked the King to be jealous.

"Suppose it is making me miserable?" said the King.

"You will just have to go on enduring life," said the Princess, pulling at another blade of grass.

"Supposing I asked you not to care for her?" said the King.

"But you won't ask it!" entreated the Princess, with sudden earnestness. "Because I do love her so much, and she has written such beautiful letters, and come all the way down here to see me, and has been so very very good to me all this dreadful lonely time——"

"Really lonely?" said the King.

"Seems as if it has now," said a muffled voice. "But if I am to be honest——" An alarmingly honest Princess sat up brusquely. "Perfectly, perfectly honest!"

"It would be so disappointing," said the King.

"Well," said the Princess, "I must confess I have not been able to keep from thinking how very much this solitude would make me appreciate life and freedom when I was set free again. And I loved the sea so much, and the country, in the rain and snow, that I wondered how ever I had endured winter in a town. And if I counted up all the happy moments I have had this last three months, I am perfectly sure they would far outweigh the miserable morbid ones. I can't help being happy. It is a chronic habit, I'm afraid!"

"You can't break off every habit at once," said the King temperately. "I don't expect the impossible."

So the Princess was allowed to go on being happy.

"If this were a book, this would be the last chapter," said the Princess dreamily. "Yet really the interesting part of my life is now about to commence; for I have never felt anything really very deeply till now, and the deep feelings are the only truly dramatic and interesting——"

"You are too analytical," said the King. "I don't like you to be clever."

"Oh, dear!" said the Princess. "You are in a very heckling mood! I think I should have had a much more peaceful time alone in my kingdom!"

"I want you to give me a present," said the King.

"Well, I just won't," said the Princess. "I will *not* give it up!"

"You have governed it so badly," said the King.

"I have not, I have not, I have not!" declared the Princess. "The Knight was the only person who fared a little badly, and he is perfectly contented and

happy now with his Tailor-made Girl. They are going to be married next year."

The Princess gave a little laugh and leant her face against the King's rough coat-sleeve, and felt so happy, you cannot possibly think.

The skies were dark now, and all the sand-dunes bathed in moonlight. The waves rolled up on the shingle, with a swish and a surge, right up, nearly to the Princess's feet. And the moon shone down serenely on the white foam as it splashed along the stones, and glistened like silvery soap-suds.

"You have given *me* a bad time," said the King. "Do you understand I was quite alone all these months in Uganda, with no one but niggers to speak to and your letters to torture me? They weren't very reassuring letters, you know. They said so much! And when I came home, you told me——"

"Oh, hush!" said the Princess.

"Sorry?" said the King.

"Fearfully," said a passionately remorseful Princess. "I never thought about your being alone."

"Give up the kingdom," said the King. "Come and rule mine!"

So the Princess gave up her kingdom.

THE END.



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